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DIARIES

1981-1982

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The Bertie Wooster of Alienation *by Momus*

MOMUS

The Bertie Wooster of Alienation

The year 1981 sees the future Momus getting increasingly hermetic; a 'voyeur with eyes in backwards'. Up in Aberdeen, Nick moves to a room overlooking the river Don. His tutor allows him to construct his own syllabus, which he chooses to begin with Goethe's Werther. On his own time he's reading Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*. Back in Edinburgh his parents separate and the family house is exchanged for two private flats at the West End. Nick is given the use of a mezzanine below his Father's Ainslie Place flat.

Everything changes in May, when at last Young Nick loses his albatross-like virginity at the hands of a radical hothead called Hanna. In the autumn everything changes again: our angst-ridden poet takes a year out of university to form a pop group with ex-members of Josef K. The Happy Family signs to 4AD Records and releases an EP and a concept LP excoriating Thatcherism.

You'd think these developments would make our antihero happy, but 1982 turns out to be the low point of Nick's life. Love hasn't solved anything, and music isn't real writing. Meanwhile the diary, written more sporadically, has become a 'fossilised superego... the pompous flourishing of belles lettres'. It's just as well he's the type to reach for Chatto & Windus paperbacks rather than opiates...



Diaries 1981-1982 Momus



Withdrawn

'You cannot give the world the slip more certainly than through art,
and you cannot bind yourself to it more certainly than through art.'

Goethe

1981

Thursday January 1st

Glasgow, its good feeling: the colour of the stone, gregarious quality, character of little sidestreets. A real city full of rounded but not closed people.

Barbara in her new flat: sat in bare feet, jeans, jersey, cropped hair. Smooth quality of her voice. Sharpness and rapidity of her speech. Grey-brown eyes, face more delicate and Eastern than I remembered. Crescents curving down from her eyes. Her postures. Her independence, intelligence. She never played the hostess (though we discussed the role), was happy to talk to the pudgy Abigail about people I knew nothing about, or to disagree flatly with something I said.

Friday January 2nd

Periphery and subordination.

With a French couple on the underground. They look at me, and I can't help putting my whole state, thoughts and emotions, clumsily encoded, in my expression. What a sweet, sharp pleasure just to be noticed!

In the Gorbals gusts reversed my gaudy umbrella and ruffled vast silt puddles. The tower blocks were discarded but inhabited — vandalised standing-stones. With a ghost behind me, vaguely threatening, I crossed the footbridge back to the place of shops, showy institutions, relics with pretensions to propriety. The People's Palace and the Indian Victorian carpet factory with its coloured brickwork and exotic crenellations welcomed me back to the anthropomorphic fantasy-land, the tip-of-the-iceberg inner city.

Saturday January 3rd

On the motorway back to Edinburgh Father holds jealously to the high lane as if it were his only claim to status. He hurtles tetchily towards the pathological tidiness of Edinburgh's streets.

The directions of fear: it can take you away from life, it can empty your words and block your inner directions. Perhaps this is its distinctive *modus operandi* in the world, where it is one of the most important arbiters. But, liberated, that is, cherished and released, it can be a force of expansion. How does one *use* one's fear properly? It is a matter of squeezing it out of the objects it (sometimes arbitrarily) inhabits? And what if those objects are people, how does one's treatment of them alter when they are deprived of their ability to cause fear (which, after all, can hold relationships together as well as break them apart)? Does fear derive from adherence to systems, or rebellion against them? From responsibility or subordination?

Too abstract. There are as many fears as personalities, as circumstances. What am I talking about — Father's fear of losing (control of) the family? My fear of The Way of the World? The more general fear (or its reverse in artists) of the deep, irrational self?

The point, then, is to personalise fear, to give it features in which one recognises oneself. If fear is systematised (as it is by its title), it is to be feared. As a personal possession, it can be experienced.

Fear lies on a continuum with all the other emotions, which are themselves joined with thoughts and physical reflexes of all kinds. But fear is a negative link — the point where the roller coaster plunges under water. You may refuse to take this dive, you may quiver poised on the summit and come as close as you can to a halt. That is abdication. That is death.

Artists go down alone, alone they brave the plunge, and relish it. But if what they really fear is the Way of the World; the stigmatisation of fear, or the institutionalisation of fear, aren't they just finding an isolationist, a personal solution? I was once accused by a Sociology tutor of describing a utopia full of isolated hermits. People must be able to give their fear a face, a handle (but not a leash) *together*. It's the paradox of breaking a repressive communality (illusory, since it permits only superficial examination of fear's properties — the most effective frightening being the least explicit) in favour of a liberating communality: 'Stop clinging together so that we can teach you how to hug!'

Detail personal fears which correspond with social fears. Make explicit their substance, its origin in certain ritual actions of the participants. Dissolve the rituals, release the fears. Plump — they fall like strange Christmas toys into the laps of children!

Sunday January 4th

'Spirit'. The word sounds like a paperclip dropped onto a thin plate of glass.

To make one's own space as a dog rotates in wild grass — yet to do this with one's feet alone, which protrude from the end of a pencil-thin glass tube which prevents one from using the space.

But this inhibition is nothing to the state I am driven to with John Thomson. From the very start of the evening I inhabit a no-man's land where thought and feeling are impossible. It is not the no-man's land of common ground, of relation (every man's land), because such a space only exists for John and me in classrooms we both claim to have forgotten: it is a useless, neglected little corner

of myself where I sulk, hoping not to be noticed, between the positive / negative of real response and the pliable, affable fraudulence of a role. The trouble is, I am not only noticed here, I am *defined*: the cobwebs, the unseen termites, cigarette ends, cuttings from ancient newspapers (particularly the financial section) are implied, imputed, to be a part of me. In the gaze of my 'friend', I become a magnet for these alien ends and odds. I tilt this way, take a breath, tilt the other way, breathe again, but neither place gives me more than gas alms.

The thing is — John is not something grey and dead, he is full of eccentric vitality which finds itself, and all its inwardly logical ways, perfectly real, sane, alive. And because John's bachelor certitude is simply the comic face of his bachelor melancholy; the lagoon in which he noisily and cheerfully paddles his little boat — so I have to stretch out and trail my hand in the water, his water, full of his organic forms, while he tries to divert me with newly-learnt manoeuvres.

Shelagh, in her cosy living room glowing with fire and TV, talks about Auschwitz over tea and cake. Downstairs, John says that she — or he — will be put away if it goes on. She has six 'depressive' stories of this sort, he could tell me any one, in every detail, at any time. Sometimes she recites them one after the other. Rattling poisonously, he compares her to a snake. Now we are underwater, in the depths of his tragic lagoon. He begins to panic, seizes out at the flat underbelly of his boat up above. He drops me at my door with relief — alone he will dry himself off and polish up his oarsmanship for better passengers. Those appreciative, those obedient, those congenially incomplete.

Wednesday January 7th

This is the time when people will talk to themselves. Words will ring from solitary walkers like jubilant war cries. I passed two on the streets this evening.

My concern is with other possibilities of form and action — and, implicitly, their relation to the prevalent ones. The disastrous swallowing up of diversity, sleight-of-hand accommodation: this is what makes things seem, beforehand, predictable, then, after a moment of dizzying revelation, they lapse into the

apparent inevitability of retrospect, and sand blows over the mark, the event. It is the unconscious turning of a corner. No matter how many corners, the pale apparatus we are provided with for thinking shows us only straight lines, chiaroscuro vistas falsely receding, denying change.

Work is essential for happiness; meaningful work, voluntary limitation. Leisure is like a child's trolley with hard wheels, a great, well-masticated chewing-gum cross planted on it, to which you stick like an insect on fly paper and hurtle down a hill in darkness. Good work kindles beacons on the route, allows you to fling back the sticky mast and steer with it.

My God, what does a picture like that mean? Set beside the logic of dream, the milky abstract curdles visibly.

Ruth in the mental hospital — like Isobel Huppert in the final scene of 'The Lacemaker'; black dress, face lined and anaemic. She speaks quietly and quickly, says nothing strange, but turns against herself easily, is fully on the side of her captors. 'I escaped today and made an appointment at the hairdresser's — look, it's like rat's tails — but I don't think I'll be up to it. They're really pretty upset that I walked out. They changed the appointment — I hope that's possible. They threw out my coffee — it made me excitable. I'll try and get some Hag stuff.' She can't stand solitude or crowds. Painting class is not fulfilling because they are only allowed 20 minutes to paint and spend an hour talking about their ideas and feelings afterwards. She was proud of some small sculptures she had made, a label she had designed for her coffee tin. She made us cups of coffee as if performing a new trick which filled her with hope for herself, and showed the world the substance it was based on.

How meticulously, alone in his room, he had made his bed! And now there was nobody to lie with him in it, though he walked the streets day and night.

Thursday January 8th

On with Nathalie Sarraute's 'Portrait of a Man Unknown', a flip through Elspeth Davie's 'Creating a Scene', bits from a purchased Sight & Sound with coffee at the Student Centre.

I should write at night. Sleep in the day.

Under a bright, low grey sky with a surprising tone of pink glowing in it, the trees, grass, cobbles and roofs shone wet with rain; sharp, distinct, uniform, fertile and serious. The forms branches make as they tilt and spray, always static. The astragals are different shades: six blue, six pink. It takes one to make you notice the other.

I live in this house as aimless as a cat. But I lack their ability to settle on a cushion and let their eyes narrow as they fade inside themselves.

Friday January 9th

I have the Beuys book at last. Also Beckett's biography and some psychology texts, all picked to stress subjectivity and intuition.

His narrow, handsome eyes began to secrete a crystalline substance. Nervous, tender laboratory assistants piously caught the tiny yellow rocks as they fell from the pouch below his eyes. With quivering fingers they placed them on clean rectangular slides and prepared the microscope. Full of dignity, he leaned forward to take his look. A sigh animated his great kingly frame, and, silently, his assistants bowed their heads and wept.

Notes from earlier — Because I am early at breakfast, Mother and Father demand to be driven to work. I must drink down my tea and take them. It is a lesson for me — Mother has been complaining that she hates sitting all day in her office room with her colleague who can only be trite or terrorist. I must shuttle them between the private and the public. Later, on the streets, I see with loathing the afraid, aggressive businessmen in their uniforms of commerce. And at the till in Thin's I look across the road into the offices of a floor below: people sit on desks

and talk to each other. It is the place of exchange, and I am not ungrateful to be excluded. The dialectics of our lives must be *more subtle* than the simple, repetitious leaps between work and home, home and work. Not polar, oppositional flicks, but a trip down serial meanders of difference. As in a film, where the meaning of one frame is determined by those round about it. This requires an almost superhuman openness, a thoroughly retentive mode in which, sentimentally, one can't bear to throw anything away.

I met John Thomson and friend at the Student Centre, where we had lunch and coffee. Empty power talk. To say that politics is the business of government, the substance of newspaper reports, is reactionary: it is to chase politics away like a dog which is threatening to disturb the roost. Politics is not only the same species as those 'protected' from it, its energy is generated by their movements, directed or chosen — rooting for food, pursuing partners, playing, fighting, dreaming.

My dissociation from objects and people — a decline from childhood, marked by myopia. I have to learn to see, touch, understand; refine my sensitivity to things. That way lies salvation.

As I climb the stairs at midnight, rattling a plug against the casing of a radio, the shadow of Father's head appears cautiously in the dark of the painted room doorway, then the opening is blocked again.

Saturday January 10th

Put up into the bright hayloft of myself by spending the day with Keith and Graham in institutions: City Art Centre, Heriot Watt, art school. Sun in the streets, coffee in light corners. Everything is acquainted with everything else, and only a woman in a black beret, coat, tights and shoes, cheekbones and face like Paula's, manner quick and unseeing, stalked like Groke through the earth-bound familiarity of things, abstracted and frightened me, and melted a great truthful hole in the candyfloss safety net above which I was showing off.

The desire to write a completely introverted novel, full of lazy ethnic currents and flights of private association, in which familiar, impersonal objects float like knives and forks attached to anonymous hands, stabbing frustratedly and indiscriminately into my thought.

With Keith to the Ken Kiff exhibition, then coffee in the City Art Centre, then some gouaches in the New 57 and a look round the Fruitmarket, then shops at the East End.

That I afterwards feel extraordinarily contented alone is proof of the therapeutic effect of good communication and empathy. We spent several hours in the cafe — I let my eyes cross the visionary mural of Edinburgh, or watched the people (punkettes, delicate Guardian readers, an arrogant sloucher, a quick, pretty Jewish-American girl, the waitresses, a woman who looked like an aged Russian ballerina) while Keith talked about likes and dislikes. He doesn't respond when I pose ideas, but loves stories.

The theme of enemies attracts me — they go out of their way to antagonise each other, it is a kind of love affair, who can say where the wrestle-hold ends and the embrace begins?

Sunday January 11th

Driving to Aberdeen in sunshine and thin clear snow which dusted sparse brush and evergreens and spires.

An English department questionnaire was waiting for me: 'To enable us to plan this course more efficiently, we should like to know which books you read in the course of last term.' I had read hardly any prescribed texts, and told them so. Under the 'General' section I put a list of books I'd read for my own interest. The fifth question asked: 'Do you have any comments about the reading load for the last term?' I wrote:

'I'm not so much concerned with the quality — reading 'load', as if students were mechanical scales which could only take so much weight — as quality of the material. Every student has different interests in literature (to believe otherwise would be to suggest we are indifferent to everything, and can only 'learn' by discipline rather than self-directing motivation), and while I believe the course as a whole has enough variety, I find the rigidity of combinations allowed stifling and ultimately alienating. A non-vocational course like literature is presumably designed to widen the mind. But a mind widened from outside, as if by a surgeon's scalpel, in directions it does not yet understand the value of, is a mind which will heal, close up, fossilise at the first opportunity. It is absolutely essential that each student develop at his or her own pace, in his or her directions. Otherwise an arts degree becomes a course in discipline, a kind of national service of the mind; its function simply to guarantee to employers a correct cultural, class attitude and the capacity for obedience.'

'What distinguishes the arts, and particularly literature, from the sciences is that in the arts there are no definitive answers to things. 'Texts' cannot be taught, only experienced. Some cultural knowledge may be necessary before one can respond to the messages of an author writing in another period, but the communication is, in the end, a personal one. If literature is about broadening minds it must have relevance to, and resonate, with, the life experience of the reader. For this reason, only the reader can (with help from those who have followed similar paths) decide his or her direction. It is not a question of 'reading load', of sore eyes or uncomfortable library chairs. The involved, self-motivated student can read several times the quantity of the disciplined, dis-spirited student, and his reading will stay with him, *become* him.'

'The world is over-structured, full of prison cells which smother organic cells. But there are places where development and growth are encouraged, if only to perpetuate the great repressive machine. It would be nice if your course were such a place.'

Monday January 12th

My sill bay tree watches the blizzard outside, still. Fanatical grain, it billows in the neon like white noise spilling and swarming. If you walk in it it offers you shockingly pointless violence. And thus it is certainly the breath of this world.

B: Why did you call me?

A: So that you would have to turn.

B: Why should I turn? I can see no reason. You are wasting my time.

A: And will you turn back now quite satisfied?

(B. does not turn back.)

The voice which is calling you back, is it yours?

And can it be my faint voice which binds you in your inversion?

B: You are not a voice, you are a silence. But you remind me of my own true sound. You would waste my time only if it were my own.

Turn away and listen to the voice that calls you back, your own voice, coldly, calculatingly, as an assassin studies the wedding photograph of his victim.

Freedom consists in a constant contradiction: having one's autonomy and, of one's own accord, giving it away. If this sacrifice is taken for granted, if the responsibility for this freedom is displaced from the giver to the receiver, one has the right and the duty to seize autonomy by force.

Wednesday January 14th

Yesterday devoted to writing 'Lalune', a pleasing but fey short story.

Today, a trek with Babis, from the Gaudie meeting to Florence's late night visit (at which she was ritually held hostage by a reading of B's perverted childfiction), and everything in between (the excruciating 'Barry Lyndon', rejuvenating ice and snow slides). Our talk is unsatisfying, like dancing on the soles of an inverted dancer without knowledge of his steps or attention to his movements, and no ground in sight. One could dance on the other's inert, rigid body, but each knows that the passivity would kill him before the heels did.

An invitation to see Shane Enright on Friday evening. Without B.

Thursday January 15th

Luckily my guide knew the suburbs. On the other hand, neither of us mentioned the object of our search. Object. Was it something to fit the hand, or the pocket? Or something to fit a satchel or perhaps a sack? My guide became excited by the snowed-over garden urn on a pedestal. It was a nondescript garden. Something had once topped this column. But it was even clear that an object was what we were looking for, perhaps instead a process or an identity.

Snatches of texture, pipes, concrete surfaces, the whitey pink of someone's skin, sounds, explicable or not, foods: do these things exist independently of our perverse perception of them? And what are we without their indifferent nourishment?

Friday January 16th

The muzak which surrounds us and takes root inside (not just music but conversations, entertainments at all levels, most systematic 'education', architecture, advertising, decor...) has an obvious and clear purpose from which we should learn (real education): it blocks any stirrings of the creative impulse left in us. Because creativity is the enemy of any total system, and industrial economies need to be total systems. Marx tried to overcome this by requiring the systematic return of systematic creativity by means of the responsibility of the worker for his own labour. But you can't turn a response into a statement which then ignores all responses: creativity is a response, a liberating army of madmen who can neither be ghettoised on the outskirts of the city nor accommodated inside its boundaries.

But it is not a question of choosing whether to collaborate now and rebel later, rebel now and collaborate later, always collaborate, always rebel: I can only do as my character (conscience, aptitudes) tells me. It will not be paid off, have its silence bought. It refuses to be helped by people who are convinced that they

know better, either the urge, or the world, and it is aware that, insofar as it attacks the physical means of its subsistence, it is gathering together strands which, tied, would hang it by the neck.

As for 'Englit', it is not just a matter of the time and effort required to read some 18th C English novel (which could only yield relevant information if degraded by the Marxist 'social document' approach). It is the changes wrought by the 'tolerance' such a task requires. Tolerance, especially enforced tolerance, is active anomie. To read these literary elephants' graveyards may be a pleasant diversion on the way to the professional post where the pistol smacks into the air and the rats begin to race, but on the way to *writing* I can afford literary disillusionment, alien tincture, less than anything else, any other distraction. For, whereas the world may ease new births with its best floral swaddling clothes (whose secret purpose is also to bind the infants' soft bones into required shape), the apprentice tailor cannot afford to let these blindfold him to the real dimensions of the human form.

'*Tolerance*: 4. Physiol. — the capacity of an organism to endure the effects of a poison or other substance, esp. when taken over a prolonged period.'

They took one too many liberties, made me too many corrective jokes. Because of her silence, which appeared to them like indifference, they continued to press their little imprints, which they thought so subtle, into her, as one might stealthily finger the eggs of a young hen without disturbing her brood by removing them, and then step firmly through the regular, wan silence of the battery hall. But then even they began to question the efficiency of their methods, which they had thought generally applicable, in her case. For she consulted too much with herself, and when moved to express a thought, gave too much away, glowed with a dangerous heat which never expanded itself but only blocked, bottomless. It was as if each tiny explosion of resentment had been veiled with shutters of lead — a lead unpleasantly familiar to them — which alone prevented a chain reaction, a complete response to their total care.

'Better go easy on her,' they agrees in consultation, 'no point in allowing her to hurt herself.'

I visit Shane Enright. I am nervous, and radiate an unnecessary coldness. I agree with his political views, although locate the problem in language and consciousness whereas he wants to attack structures in their physical form. I affirm the usefulness of a negative orientation in relation to them, and the tendency of people to subscribe to myths which guarantee consensus, no matter how banal they seem in terms of 'absolute relativity' (!). It's all very joyless, and our solutions are so personal that it seems the meeting has only thrown us off course for long enough to compromise, to mediate our views a hairsbreadth, and unnecessarily. I listen to Linton Kwesi Johnson, and read e.e. cummings.

Does fear of the same things really unite outgroups? Can any fear be positive in a relationship?

Some sensitive points: I said: 'Neal seems to respect your opinion.' S said: 'I don't know why he has such faith in me.' I didn't reply, hoping to let his modesty return to him with its falsity intact. But perhaps he thought I was letting his 'doubt' stand. He offered me a volume of his lover's poetry to borrow. I refused, said: 'I really prefer prose.' Stupid, true. Stupid as truth tends to be.

Saturday January 17th

Lay in bed until dark. Conceived a story, 'People's Court', while studying photographs of Beuys actions.

Thoughts after the almost oppressive humanity of a Truffaut film, 'Love on the Run': my great seriousness weighs me down like the deep chord of Messaien which is vibrating endlessly (just as I write 'end' it ends) though my speakers. My insistent forays into the darkness in the interests of liberating the suppressed change things around, make lightheadedness — the banal but life-lusty side — the suppressed element of me. And yet so many things bar my entrance to this realm, things outside me to which I respond with distaste: the remarks of some Science

students about a girl whose sexy clothes were too 'arts-studenty'; the sight of a young tree on the Hillhead grass lying broken in the melting snow; the enthusiasm of boys and girls alike for the violent insignificance of a rugby game; empty cans of lager, smashed milk bottles in lounges and corridors; a drunken conversation on the bus in which two girls giggle and say nothing in thousands of words; two overseas Theology students talking across the dinnertable, each showing great enthusiasm for his own remarks and barren, stony indifference to the other's.

We do such violence to each other, we can't help it, and what's more, it's even required of us, there's no abstention without punishment. Good will? Don't set a bad example, don't fuck things up, they'll crucify you if you do.

The girl and I can't meet, we stand on opposite sides outside the childish garden, and my writing is keeping the key for itself. But it finds itself locked out too, for there is no conflict of interests.

It's only here that we're eroded between facts and ourselves. But every there becomes a here: we rejoice only on approach.

I rail against my immersion in this 'total institution', but the only thing total about it, apart from its monopolisation of my material support, is its indifference to me.

Hold onto the young Brecht, young Currie, he is where you badly need to be! (— at bosoms and throats). Otherwise, sensitive plant, you will get withered, potted, bound to a stick, and pissed upon to make you grow!

It isn't that catalogue of small violences which will harm me, but my fear and magnification of its instances, a fear nurtured, no, engineered in me by this clinking cave of intellect, bristling with scrupulously ordered stalagtites and stalagmites. Those professors with their mental drawers of small stainless implements, kiss them 'til they choke up all their digestive acids and vomit all their distinct poisons safely away!

Sunday January 18th

Hands in pockets, I slink suave around the tundra pavements in town, standing for long intervals in glassy doorways, hardly escaping the vituperative wind, keeping the decay company. At last the Art Gallery opened, and I filled myself with its coffeeshop wares and would myself round its monumental blowing radiator. My notes:

My life is like vomiting on an empty stomach: all the pain of expelling an unclutterable emptiness.

Argh! The British! They even deep-fry their furniture! When their sex life flags they go to holiday camps: 'Butlin it and you'll do it again.'

You open the fridge door and admire your fine art collection, which observes all the proprieties of hanging and the standards of line and finish which you expect of the dead (isn't the skeleton the body's most tidy, economic and disciplined form?).

Crying is what you do when you look out at colourlessness from your domestic spectrum. Outside, things are not so simple; for a start, the tears freeze in your eyes, and above all you must see.

A big black dog frisking with a little mottled one against a snowslope seen through two mesh fences.

Never coming closer than the fringes of the crowd, he threw stones at himself as he stood at its centre.

So They Say

'Be an angel,' they say
They'd do it if *they* could

But you'd help if *you* would
(Return empty bottles,
Their enemies throttle...)
'Be an angel,' they say,
And you do it.

'Be a devil,' they say,
'It's in both of our interests
So follow your instincts,'
(Take Anna to bed,
Put a hole in your head...)
'Be a devil,' they say,
And you do it.

'Be a man,' they say,
'We require greater lengths,
Be a pillar of strength,'
(Can you drain what you're drinking,
Kill without blinking...?)
'Be a man,' so they say,
And you do it.

Nettle tea with Nona Sposi in her room. The first private talk with a girl at university, three years in. I'm invited for kedgereee or coffee...

Babis & Catherine come round. B goes to buy some food from the cafe, and C reads this note, written by me last night: 'Cherchez la pute! I want to lay my head between her legs and take in great tracts of her inner thigh with my tongue as a skateboard rider swings from tilted rim to rim.' I explain the meaning of 'tracts', 'thighs', 'rim'.

'Ah, it's good, I like it,' she says, looking at me with her panda-bear button eyes.

'Bluff': For many months all they heard from his room was the dynamo squeal of his nose pecking the grindstone. 'And now he expects us to reupholster him,' they scoffed, drawing their hands flatly across their faces.

I meet Gage in the TV lounge after 'The History Man'. She speaks to me, close to my face, so that I smell a hint of alcohol on her breath. A pursuit, the chance of an end containing a beginning! Outside the moon sends rings into the cloud like a blob of milk on filter paper. Under hilariously slithery ice the grass abandons itself to the damp soil. I cross it like Johnny Head-in-Air, the tips of my fingers jump with anticipatory static.

She agreed with me about the Truffaut film, then I told her 'it's changed my life!' 'See you tomorrow,' she said. How things stack themselves up then disperse, shower down in an orgasm of benefaction!

This awful habit I have of exaggerating my highs (especially when real events look likely to be changed) so that the inevitable desurgence links hands with the dour honesty of pessimism. I'm not going to repeat the 'Florence-type-hype' with Gage. It will all be perfectly real and reasonable.

Monday January 19th

The prepared lines died in my mouth, and though in my eyes she was prettier than I remembered, Gage faded when she expressed annoyance with the hero of Hamsun's 'Hunger', when she conceded points to the tutor ('Oh, forget it...'), when she ran away and vanished in the corridor outside the room while I was thanking Dr. Milton for his Xmas card...

'I had visions of us running towards each other in slow motion with our arms spread, from opposite corners of a Hillhead bedroom.' A bad line anyway, an awkward and coy one. What packeted contents spill around my brain after such tiny social successes, themselves after years of total anonymity. Back to the stores with this soap!

I visited Keith & Graham at the art school. We watched our Fittie film forwards and backwards, ate lunch, ventured onto thin ice, passed from sun to shade amongst the plants and pictures of the corridors, admired colours and textures, discussed aesthetics and processes.

What liars words are.

Things seem to draw themselves into bitter, watery oppositions: them or me; squat beings who squabble and caress, or my cormorant perch in utmost heavy privacy. Because other people's rewards have become my punishments: driving cars, sociable evenings in pubs, joking, television, habit, the Sunday roast, secure employment, the family bosom... the punishments are endless, the reward is only one. And unsteady at that. But the way I counter their infringements, the way I scatter their gifts, shows that I have made a choice, and that is the chief thing. I can begin to knead and work and shape this cluster of cast-off thoughts, draw this glob of useless sediment into something my own. For this right I abjure all others.

I spend so much of the time seeing things I don't want to see, hearing stories or musics I don't want to hear, feeling the nauseous hardness, softness, vibration of things, finding myself saying things I hate myself for saying... that the only thing which keeps me breathing is the perpetual struggle to invest these public things — inner and outer, no respecters of lines, these — with intensely, secretively private meaning.

Wednesday January 21st

In a dream I cast a glance out from a shore fairground and captured sight of small black figures, elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus etched on the sea, walking on the surface like lost relics.

As I walked down to the Arts Lecture Theatre at 7 I became enraptured with the moon for these and other reasons: it is alone in the sky; it suffers the detraction of our systems and grids of petty lights; it contains all colours and only one; it is

without nature (life) yet evinces vital change in mood; it uses light's wane and flare to evade the skeletal null of its own form; it has a human face and history which survive without and despite books; the decade of my childhood was devoted to reaching it.

After writing some of these in the psychology lobby, I walked without foreknowledge into a Czechoslovakian film ('Baron Munchausen', 1962), a delightful fantasy about the moon and its inhabitants.

Nona visited me and talked about American films (she loves, for instance, 'The Warriors'). I become a fossil in such circumstances, and play out the despondency I feel is expected of me by being unconvincingly enthusiastic and ordinary. My deep delightful seriousness draws things to it like a whirlpool's eye unblinking, unwinking even when quietude is its precinct.

Oblivious to rush hours bus and street crowds I formulated grievances against 'Englit' in my notebook, ready to confront Mr Hewison (whose note demands 'Where are you?') with my truth, my secession.

Russell is right to be 'In defence of idleness'. People emulate traffic, rush to their next business with the vigour of things trying to depart themselves. But they can't escape their appendices, which gape obscenely at the back of their heads, like mouths on straps, open wounds which can only absorb, never discharge their poison.

Friday January 23rd

Yesterday I fell into harmony with Mr Hewison when I found my noninstrumental 'total commitment' to literature ('but not criticism') matched his. By agreement, I am now free to choose what books I read. Conditions: I must submit 3 essays a term, the books should lie within the period of the course, and Mr H should be forewarned of my choices. My first destination: Goethe's 'Sufferings of Young Werther'.

Leave the village-to-village bus at a request stop and stroll through the metropolitan monuments which rise neglected on either side of the busy route.

I knocked on the outside of Viv's flat at intervals today, taperecorder in my bag and blank tapes wound back ready to register her experiences of nursing the mad. As I was walking away from the final visit unsuccessful I looked back to see a figure chinking the lace curtain of the flat front. Let her be, she has the right to be her own doorwoman!

I phoned the family home and sounded its darkness from centre to shell. This for the second night! They are spared my news.

Nona raps her copper courage on my indifference by suggesting meetings to which I happily agree before continuing about my senseless business. She is led towards me by my confirmation of her inferiority complex; I drift away because of mine.

I need someone to draw me out of my hangjaw fear-play in the dark. But it must be someone in the opposite direction from Nona, who eclipses the worldsum and dims my selfearth, whereas I seek a gravitational body who will reflect from her features the soft light which will illuminate my landscape.

He lived smug and dusty on a high shelf in a box marked 'Poetry'. As he grew taller on his perch, he saw the need for a leap. For, whereas the ceiling was not a danger, was lost in the inconceivable up there, the shelf, not a luggage rack, bowed under his weight as if lusting after mother earth, and he began to yearn after a judgment: was he caryatid or carrier-bag?

I had my photograph taken by someone I hardly know, but he didn't tell me why. A judgment does not explain, it merely fixes.

No room here for pale precarious inklings, well mulled humus. This is a space for the world to breathe in! But the world is an airstream without organs of articulation. It requires the light jaws and the dark damp blots.

Saturday January 24th

I phoned Edinburgh then took the bus downtown with Nona and alone saw an exhibition at Art Space of paintings by a local artist, Bill Baxter. I recognised many scenes, treated (badly) in a wide range of secondhand techniques, sloppy provincial modernism. Yet the obvious schizophrenia which reeled through the images disturbed me, and I was forced to recognise a power in the distasteful, untalented strangeness of the canvases. Outside on the streets the people too thronged shops with their incomprehensible ugliness and their of-this-place specificity. Can there not be a proletarian internationalism which elevates rather than, like television, trivialising the universal part of each of us?

The first sin against humanity is telling it what's good for it. The second is closedness to diversity. The third is tolerance of those who sin these ways.

Only active, committed negation can be opposed to 'sinful' affirmation, since this affirmation is itself negation by omission.

Speak your nos, if they apply, to all humanity, including yourself. Speak your yesses only to yourself. You are permitted only to hope that others are doing the same. (And publish this hope?)

Don't 'think politically'. Just let your thought mingle with your life; that is the only politics.

She trails the stale air of somebody else's fantasy. She could only accord with mine if she were her own.

My commitment to literature is an indirect way of expressing my commitment to people. This realisation surprises and pleases me. Because ordinary social living requires great commitment which can't be taken on by a state on one's behalf. Ordinary social living requires all the logic of love.

Man's tragic flaw is that he is unable to ignore the beauty of his victims. The uglier he finds himself, the less able is he to let his dignity, what little remains, halt his sacrifice. For it is ultimately a self-sacrifice: he hates himself to death for hating himself to death.

'An endless column of perhapses saved him from petrifying completely. "You were in danger of becoming a monument to yourself," they cried, and carried him on their shoulders back to his fellows. He arrived anonymously.'

'Well, well,' exclaimed the tourists, and, stepping back from the inscription, squinted up at the imposing dark form of the statue.

To make art you must be unable to relate to your subject without describing it. And since you yourself are part of the subject, you will be able to ascertain the truth of the description.

Present tense must be broken into. The convention of retrospective selection of significant detail is too measured. Given the latitude of cinematic uncertainty, I may discover what I want to say. Also: the immediacy of (Eastern) sense perception against (Western) mechanisms of memory. The realistic gradualness of experience, in which slight change of emphasis fixes events while compilation of sensations unfixes them. Unity of event and personal perception. Flow of influence from one to the other nonetheless.

Monday January 26th

Drew the SOSA poster, made a song out of 'So They Say'.

After a meal with Nona we went to 'Eraserhead' at the Union. The claustrophobia was heightened by the pressure of a half of cider on my bladder. A film of ridiculous blackness, etc etc. Afterwards N came with me to see Lawrence's 'Trespasser' on the South Bank Show. Gage sat ahead, at the end she gave me only the most cursory 'hello'. All these impossible things together, like a play using characters from five other plays. With N I have so little communion that

things seem completely unreal, and somehow I limp through the semblances of talk and motion. A friend of Nona's, she tells me, thought me 'So cool as to be icy'. But I didn't know this friend, how could she have known me well enough to judge? After the Lawrence, parting on the hard grass (stars, chill, awkwardness) with utterly mechanical thanks — 'I must get back to my little room.' 'Thanks for accompanying me to the film.' 'Thanks for the meal.' When I reached my room I dealt myself a slap which hurt and awoke me.

Somebody who doesn't reach out to others will only meet those who do.

Nona's father works for BP. Nona is still her father's little girl. Nona's university fees are paid by BP. Last week Nona offered me a free ticket to escort her to a BP function. When Nona said the dark-clad spike-head resentful boys frightened her I replied that I felt much more sympathy for them than for drivers of company cars.

Nona is so worried that you'll criticise that she pre-empts to overkill. Nona keeps a hoard of teddies and dolls. Nona is afraid of being alone. Nona's hair is long disciplined and red.

After the Lawrence:

Nona: It was very intense.

Me: Oh, I don't know, I thought it dispelled intensity. Purgation is the word. (His desperate irony underlining at random.)

I can only open the door to those for whom an answer is not required, from whom no knock comes.

At first the day lives itself all over me. And then it wanes enough for me to write myself on top of it. A half-light victory, at every new day's light a defeat.

It's ludicrous: she auditioned me for a part in her conspiracy theory — 'How the World Rejected Me, Though I Left No Stone Unturned'. Another worm for her collection.

Hamming for the sole benefit of the moon.

Why do you blame yourself when someone fails to generate for you the sense of the extraordinariness of the ordinary? This sense which releases so much energy into you. Without which you can give nothing, only turn away.

The way Lawrence's lovers were dislodged by the advertisements which cut brutally through their space; the crunching and shouting of the uncommitted; the soullessness of television itself; our memories of the last film, our unwilling fulness with the nauseous quick vibrations of our time — doubts like these shrill like alarm clocks when art leaves out our lives' base truths.

Tuesday January 27th

I swan through ashes.

An automated churning in the dark outside, an upcoiling boiler squatting above in the rafters, a high pressure whistle which cuts in on my right ear, the sense of a lapse in gravity, the helpless blur of my natural vision, the tatters of my lips, the grit strewn the ground, the slam bang bawl of a capitalist television picture, a gnawing waistband, a radical's digestion, a sense of gridlessness. But somewhere in there lurks euphoria.

I devised the bulk of my self-directed reading scheme today. Starring: Rousseau, Goethe, Hegel, Blake, Gogol, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, Byron, Kierkegaard. I located some of these pale old men at their shelf resting-places; eg Kierkegaard's 'Repetition' and 'Fear & Trembling'. For the most part they're goaty old solipsists. To survive their rancid trampling over territories my life has not yet reached, I ought to fling myself into, let us say, love. But the more possible the social presence seems, the less likely the spark. The honest spark.

That I should stoop to such thoughts! That I dare even aspire...

This fatal individualism! The self knows that it must throw away what it wants to keep.

Give me a flat on Easter Road or one of Glasgow's tumbledown arteries. Only the working class has the right to sunshine.

Everything I see sends me signals, exclusive, requiring no answer, allowing no deciphering. If I challenge the sender, whether a person or a view, I will be snubbed, ignored: 'There was no communication,' I will be informed. And so the messages continue.

		watch.
you do not	touch	
the furnishings.		
only		watch.
here		blinks
are		winks.
movement	without	
—————		stop.

'Man unites himself with the world in the process of creation.' Fromm. '...the unity achieved in productive work is not interpersonal. The full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in *love*.'

Thought: my stories are over-determined, too intensely and carefully wrought. I must attempt a long, tentative, improvisatory development; a reading out instead of welding together, pier instead of bridge. But as this diary — notebook — shows, I suffer from the initiate's flaw: premature ejaculation. My trains of thought have no sooner set out for some heroically monumental destination

than the passengers catch sight of a pine tree down a siding, and, afraid of losing even this site, halt, disembark and begin their inflationary oration.

Fears for fuel, creative energy shortage.

Wednesday January 28th

At some point or over some length of time I have reached the decision *not to be here*. This attitude is very quickly understood by others, who help things along by acting as if I were not there (Gaudie meeting today). This response is the same as that used to integrate people who *are* there: taking the person's evaluation of himself as the basis for interaction.

The question is, having once decided to fade out of an environment in this way, can one, in another place, integrate at will?

An abstention is an active affirmation of another state of being which is not just an internal construction. But to find it...

The danger is that this ideal is *partially* present everywhere, absolutely present nowhere. If I fade out of an environment I condemn every aspect, every characteristic of it, including those I am affirming. So I make a question of kind out of a question of degree.

I am here (what are the rules here?).

I am here (what can I make of this?).

I am here (but really I am not here.).

Not only do I take without giving, but I do so as if it were a curse devised to spite me. In this light, my refusals (of a degree, of the aid of my class, of recognition, of friendship...) are a kind of gratitude: only when they trust me enough to stop giving will they receive anything from me. But for this offering to be *mine*, not just a repayment of dues, I must begin to give before their program of inputs is over. I must give *in spite of* taking.

Notes from the Burial Ground: a figure standing on the graveyard boundary wall almost a mile distant. Monumental structures. Those stadium lights. Uneven dark green shadows on light green. Me between the dead and the industrious. Both seem closer to each other than to me. The smell of the dead is calmativ, like a blend of healing teas.

By small degrees you can get yourself tangled up in the workaday world. Only an expert eye can see the encroaching danger. To ward against envelopment is a full-time occupation.

The route, the rote, the rota, the routine, but no root. Eventual rot like dead grey teeth planted here in the graveyard. Then you are a root, too late, too late.

Living is just death's little joke.

Men walking on top of the smoking tar, part of the eternal evaporation.

All this about the 'decision' not to be here is worth less than the feeling of anguish which this drift towards nonbeing creates. But does this anguish help me to live or to write? Obstinate opposition.

Idea for a 'story': mock behaviourist experiments with 'Peter & Jane' as subjects. Bizarre procedures described deadpan.

Thursday January 29th

I sallied into the world and discovered the shiny attractiveness of people, a brightness which is not just a sheen but wells up from calm depths.

The play of eyes, of expressed thoughts, of places in respective lives, of advice, of creative experience, of sexuality.

She has thin lips and is concerned by domestic violence, he is willing to shave off his beard to act Lalune for video, he has the name and faith of an archangel, her smile rests on a delicate edge and her eye is not averse to mine, he repeats new couplings serially, she explains her divorce, they approach and they recede, beckoning.

Petra.

Your sentences come
Bearing orange juice and dogs
And motorcycle maintenance
But tell me
Why
Do my revolutions
And devotions
The citric fluids
Of my heart's message
Splash back from you uncherished?

And do you lie fallow,
An owner shunning owners,
Alone without sharing aloneness,
A daughter wielding her nun's cross
Against pale lovers
And lewd fathers
Alike?
But we are not alike.

And you beneath your habit
Are yourself, and long
(Oh somewhere)
Long
For me to take you seriously
As I ask.

Yet all I know
Is the peace your window brings:
Dark in the light row
And light in the dark.

*

A happy flat
A regulated falling short
No prospects
Things block your view of being
Lights, diversions, happy chat
A happy flat
Why should you change?

'Aha! Here — as good an impersonation of nowhere as anywhere else!'

Drop a birch twig
Through a glass of water
Let it stand upright
See how it seems to split
At centre
Forgets itself, divides
Into a thing of water
And of air.
Suspensions of each other
Its parts turn different shades,
Pass along their common trunk
Watered breath and air for drink.

So you and I together
Waste the halves
That joined could make a stir

And coldly clink our glasses' rims
To link the parters of our parted selves.

The soup tureen of the last week: stock — one chance meeting on a train.
Principal ingredients — two parts Erich Fromm ('To Have or To Be', 'The Art of Loving'); three parts fear (simmer self vigorously); a small sprinkling of encouragement; a counter-sprinkling of misunderstanding; a scattering of the letters of Young Werther, re-awoken sexuality to taste. Directions — mix inexpertly then flush down toilet.

Thursday February 19th

They are military. They make me angry, and that is a trick to make me like themselves. Actually our angers are different. Theirs is a habit. It is even gentle. A routine indifference to certain things, that is how one might characterise their anger. One pictures them brushing their teeth. They clench, as if responding to the instructions of a dentist. They scrub with the bristles of the brush, in the prescribed way, for the required length of time. Then they spit the frothing mint sediment so that the cold stream carries it over the porcelain and away. The plates of the drain guard divide the foam in four parts, as it is flung through by the momentum of the water. Of course, it is not that they watch all this with pleasure. I do not. But it is, for them, a part of their pleasure in the ritual to see this foam, which contains the pieces of food, sugary solution, bacteria, all that attacked them from within, all that threatened to corrode and undermine their exposed bone, the fifth column of their bodies, that scum, this foam, to see it flushed away so remorselessly. In glee they fill their mouths with the icy water straight from the tap, and it rolls around, castigating their gums, jaws and tongues for their pinkness and warmth.

No. This is my way of seeing. Behaviour for them is like playing snap with entries in encyclopaedias. First they note the most obvious features of the place, the event, the process. Then they scan their minds for the authoritative entry, no, law, which offers the pure form of that place, event, process. And — snap! — all extraneous details, all features not ordained, not contained in the

encyclopaedia's account are trimmed off, washed away, singed out of the mind. That is their way of seeing.

ogod ogod.

I must start this inner echo again, this eternal, prettifying dialogue with my shored-up self: running from surf, only dipping a toe in, contemplating the closest sails, only dots.

Of course, my memory without it is better, undoubtedly I can see myself as I am more clearly when I am not juggling my own detritus before my eyes.

Since writing here last, some leaps in self-knowledge gleaned from Storr ('Dynamics of Creation'), Bair ('Samuel Beckett'), Laing ('Divided Self') especially latter. Creative schizoid tending towards disembodiment, tending towards anal retentiveness with experiences, gestures, ideas, words, faeces, tending towards exhibitionism, scrabbling periodically in own scree to escape all these. Some success, some alchemical conversion of fart to art, or a hope of it. Little hope of anything else. And some goodnesses, no doubt, missed by the 'black sun' of internal scrutiny. Turns room of residence into box of anomie. Could make it a study, could turn it into a studio, workshop, place of origin of things of consequence: doesn't, hasn't. Certain connections with others — lapsed, all lapsed. Knows of no comforts to be gained from such links. Hopes; marshals perhaps for future happiness.

Werther's blue coat by now stained red. Not a pretty paradigm. The W-effect supposes causes. No such luck. Content to continue a voyeur with eyes in backwards, naming the amorphous migrations there in the tall dark.

Feel better already to have said all this so cleverly.

Friday February 20th

That last comment puts things unacceptably into light. Two things are mixed up in these notes: examination of self and playful artificing. The brute conclusions of the first have their edges softened by the second. Loss is turned quite unjustifiably into profit. The court sits in eternal session, condemning its own practices in rhetoric it rejoices in. The case is lost in words. If some novice judge stood up and said 'This court is a danger to itself and society' he would be jeered out, although no-one would disagree with his statement. Right and wrong are only styles of speech, in this court. Outside the locked doors there are streets and people. Each passerby has likes and dislikes, vulnerable opinions, amorphous interests latent or insistent. Will they be issued with sheets of iron from the court? No, they will accept only thought and feeling something like their own.

Adjourn.

Other courts: the Creative Writing Group, for instance. McIlvanney cannot sit in judgment, he's more like a gardener tidying up an amateur's plot. But when I criticise it's as if I'm being offered graftings for sale. I can only explain why these tentative growths would not suit the great rambling enclosure which I am temporarily neglecting, which has packed me off grudgingly on day release.

Not logic, not flourish, not even necessity makes these linear deposits *writing*.

Sunday February 22nd

This little room sustains me, generations away from these others around. My books strew the bedspread, my lamplight pools over the orange, my collage and temple inscriptions lie still and wise on the wall before. A wisp of aerial brings, say, Stravinsky, into the air, on tape fragments of Webern. Winding the strings tauter or looser, I play my guitar. The light on the view changes rapidly, seasons more slowly. Sometimes a visitor comes, but not often. I am left to my own devices, and because I never fling myself against the limits of these, I feel unbounded. Energies do however accumulate, and beyond the testing and sensation of potential stands a brink, and beyond the brink is a discipline and a

limitation and a singleness without which everything before it is a dawdle without direction.

Poetry plus chaos equals prose. But the poetry and the chaos cannot be assimilated to each other. They must curdle, wrestle. There must be periods of agitation and of still. The one is always and forever trying to annihilate the other. Death is either applied or implied — to form by chaos, to chaos by form. The rules are unwritten and binding.

Friday February 27th

The great urge to commit suicide yet remain alive as a thorn in the monumentally banal sides. Something they will not explain but all too easily comprehend. A bloody lump of their own flesh, nails still intact and clingdigging.

Sunday March 1st

Wrote screenplay 'The Derelict', based on 'Lalune'. Best thing I've done. Makes a handsome trout of me. Opens vistas on the run.

Monday March 2nd

A simple misunderstanding marks my talk with Father, sketchy as it is. He thinks that his having studied English Lit. at university has something to do with my present trajectory. He goes by, clings desperately to, the old tabula rasa notion. But like all believers in objectivity, he fails to apply cultural relativity to his notion of emptiness. The vacant space he sees in me is constituted of nothing but a projection of the essence of his nature, that in himself which he takes for granted, the ground of his being. So naturally when I make any independent move he feels a grating 'asymmetry', thinks that somewhere out on one of the branches for which he is the trunk something is nagging against the grain.

My sexuality either devours or deserts me. I can't seem to find any position between the insanity of possession and monkish indifference. The first leads to

frustration and guilt, the second — the second leads to a sense of relative deprivation, the maudlin tenderness engendered by the sudden unglamorous intuition of what touching lips must be like. That's the best of it, however. Most of the time the monk feels completely estranged from flesh and blood, and to maintain his immunity falls into the smug habit of finding fault, on petty distant pretexts, with anything breathing, moving, which threatens to attract.

In the face of music, which laughs at aesthetics and commands instantly, what power have words and concepts? Only specificity; the Gorgon's gift of designating and trapping excerpts from the constant hubbub. And I work against this property, set language against itself, seek to reinstate the defined gravel to its former particle chaos. For if words, at one level, are authorised to take life, used with greater subtlety it is necessary for them to return it, and acknowledge their impotence. This humbleness, following arrogance, is something that music, in its independence, cannot match.

Monday March 11th

I vacillate between vacancy and alarm. I negate the world in which I undoubtedly live by submitting gratefully to the insights of masters — Laing, Adorno — and allow myself to be guided by them.

Laing: 'It is a desperately urgently required project for our time to explore the inner space and time of consciousness.'

But also my own questions:

If it is 'objectively' desirable to have the lot of the majority, how can it be subjectively desirable to shun it?

Beliefs are worse than useless (stupid, empty) if not lived.

Lock Laing's observation in with your own.

The point is not that everyone should suffer the miseries of the majority (isn't one person's misery another's pleasure — what bricklayer could tolerate my ascetic isolation, and how long would I last on a building site?) but that those in a position which seems generally more fortunate — more free, rife with potentiality — should not bend inwards to cower and hide their wealth of determinable possibility, but should advertise the reality of such a position of choice and so emphasise the methods which realise it or the obstacles which block it from others.

The position I am urged to take (by parents, grudgingly, by McIlvanney) is the one Kafka held: the bourgeois fifth-columnist, using the tensions of being locked into the overclass to undermine it. This is a position of self-laceration, creative *barakiri*. Its risk is of turning a death-mission against oppression into a ritual self-sacrifice which maintains and perpetuates it.

The entry for 27.2.81 is my gut crystallisation of this course. But I must investigate the possibilities *beyond* this.

Friday March 13th

I waste my efforts by reserving them for the personal and esoteric alone — tastes which draw me to extremes of sensibility which deny the simple, rough-hewn shapes and so make them shadowy and oppressive. Fear of becoming undifferentiated has the opposite effect — instead of supporting the 'true' against the 'false' in me, it sections off a small acreage, posts ominous notices ('Danger! Keep out! Land undergoing development!'), and allows vast tracts, areas subject to comprehensible and communicable weathers, to run dangerously wild from neglect. And so the particular balance of similarity and difference which this greater part of a human being evinces is abandoned, and with it all recognisable individuality. All that is left is a parade of freaks, straggling and unseen by any audience, who go vainly in search of the reservoirs of normality on which they depend.

I know that the ordinary is beyond belief: all I need is the courage to explore it without fear of losing this conviction.

Against whims and dreams place discipline, without which all glimpses of possibility remain glimpses.

Laing, Buber, Rilke.

I am proud, and scorn to see the spring lovers, people in ugly British clothes and sun-triggered immemorial moods, clamping arms awkwardly around each other and chattering with such incautious ease. How they talk! Exchanges about courses and friends go on as if each were completely uninhibited and completely alone, like children who drift contentedly into sleep with their heads full of friends and games, and fear is just what grown-ups play at. Here come the crocuses and here come the placid three-leg-races, not at all self-conscious, not at all ironical. And I, in my pride, even take the air to task for being so warm, and scorn the old adversary which used to buffet me with massive and unflagging blows.

I'm torn between religious astonishment at everything and the nausea of nihilism. The first wants to embrace the world but shrinks back from the slightest violence (like a plane crossing a pleasing sky), and is chided by the second, which understands the joy of ugliness all too well, and delights in despoiling laundered illusions. Neither self can pass amongst others in the world without doing them injustice, and both appear unattractive and unapproachable to these others.

Somebody called Hanna at the Creative Writing Group party, Wednesday night. Claimed to be there under false pretences. Habit of leaning over you intimately when she talks. Belgian father, Scottish mother. Exotic past: youth in Africa. Knows exactly what she approves, derides anything else. Even her equivocal interests (parapsychology) are presented like a challenge. Demanded of the group 'Who has a car? I need a lift to Skene Square.' McIlvanney offered, but she strode out at 12.30, to his relief. I can't resist a security based on intelligence, not

stupidity — how is it possible? Like her, but cherish no illusions. Celibacy a cage nearing completion. An inside job.

Monday March 16th

FEAR OF CALM

At the onset of calm, he was already in daze of intensest dread.

PASSAGE OF TIME

The slaughter of fey impulse was his wont and whimsy.

HE MAKES EFFORTS

In through the correct channels, without fear of outcome.

TORPOR OF PASSION

While consumed with love he set his thought to work in contemplating form.

AND YET

It cannot be undervalued too highly.

COLD COMFORT

Mistakenly forced to room temperature and rendered ineffective.

HE MOVES

Sometimes involuntarily, as if robbed of faculties rightfully his.

SLEEP OF REASON

As interrogation progresses, certain moments of no import flirt on the skirts of memory.

SUDDEN UNCERTAINTY

When he glimpsed her old string bag with her features strewn inside.

A FAVOURITE PHRASE

A favourite phrase was...

ABHORRENT BIT

Hygiene conjoined with filth, and both were compromised.

A PERFECT MODEL

He dispensed with all his bright ideals one fine day.

IN FINE FETTLE

It was his way to skin bad thoughts alive.

MAKE NO MISTAKE

A favourite phrase.

INTUITION OF STALENESS

Horrendous similarities proved schematic and failed to escape his notice.

THE SUBSTANCE OF DELIGHT

Regrettably vandalised beyond belief.

BEFORE HIS TIME

Breath was being breathed before his time.

THE MEASURES TAKEN

Countless and uncounting.

HIS SINGLE PLEASURE

To paddle in his resources.

Thursday March 19th

Outside the wind is swirling horribly and the windows and curtain can't stop it laying cold and dizzying fingers on me here in my room. I'm thinking of taking a shower — the second this morning — but for the time being I continue to lie clothed in bed. I am ashamed to be seen in these wrinkled and baggy clothes. My hair is like a combed horse's tail, driech and prim. I had thought of going to look for Hanna (I want to offer her the part of Ann in 'The Derelict') but I can't face the soul-destroying uncertainty of waiting in the cafe at the pavilion, planning chance meetings at nodal points around campus only to break them off for fear of outstaying the casual welcome my casual facade invites.

My room is approaching bareness. They are to redecorate it over Easter, and my paper installations, which covered the imperfections of the walls quite satisfactorily, are to be replaced with slick banal paint. The room will not smell the same after they have desecrated it with their unintentional workaday ham fists. But it is not mine to cherish, neither would I like it to be. It doesn't concern me; one set of walls is as good as another.

Each day I find some text or line between discourses to divert me. Yesterday it was Klein on schizoid-psychosis, today Adorno on cultural criticism. On Sunday it was Camus. Yes, that was a good day, spent in Algeria. Then Keith came.

On Tuesday evening I met Keith at the art school. We looked at the library with directors' eyes, then crossed the road to the pub. Met Iain Brady, who won the RSA student show prize. The polite thrust of his questions, accompanied by a flash of the teeth. His aspirations to be a bourgeois: 'I want to eat well. My mother never fed me properly.' That set me off on psychoanalysis, and Keith grew cynical and noncommittal. We parted just as I had reached psychosexual development ('It's a well-known fact that Van Gogh was fascinated by faeces — he transferred it to the handling of paint.') Can one know truths without the stupidity of abstract complication? Or does it just take longer, to acknowledge the necessary theories before transcending them? Keith just draws, and is thus wise.

Yesterday evening I visited a Londoner working for BP, Nigel Jacklin. He's interested in noise as music, put a notice up in the Union. Isn't really musical: his guitar had never been tuned properly, his tapes were just comfortably disorienting background music. I asked how his liking for Scritti Politti was compatible with his lifetime commitment to BP. 'Oh, a lot of things about me aren't compatible. BP is a good company to be with — the size of it gives you a freedom you wouldn't have with Smith's engineering or something.' He'd done articles and graphics for fanzines. They were both in collage styles. The disjointed prose harped on loneliness and isolation and kept repeating the phrase 'Nihilist noise'. I asked 'Do you call yourself a nihilist?' 'I don't really know what that word means.' I explained that it meant believing in nothing. 'Oh, I believe in some things,' he said. He'd been to a public school, and felt some responsibility towards his parents. His Italian girlfriend lives in London — they might be getting married quite soon. The thing he likes least about BP employees around him is their attitude towards women — they hang Mayfair calendars in their offices, nudge and wink with each other, make gestures in description of secretaries' chests.

His cold flat with a picture of an orange clown hung on the wall, his music incongruous beneath it. He had discovered that when the blind in the kitchen was raised and its strings were plucked, an interesting noise resulted. He intended to collect sounds on a small tape-recorder, 'my new toy'.

Outwardly handsome, a deep, slightly retarded pronunciation, inwardly weak & confused.

When I phoned Emma, she handled me like a company PR, all sweetness and formula, emptiness and distance. When I phoned Mark he asked about my birthday party, and conceded to me the use of the car.

What I'm trying to say — for the list could and should've been extended — is that with people I experience only the displacement of contact — 'a never-ending see you soon', when even words exchanged are only substitutes for other words which might really speak, really link. True I enter conversations with no expectation of more (this is why Hanna seems like a magician: she is astonishingly *there*) and leave them depleted predictably.

The word 'miserable' springs to mind a lot, but lacks conviction even of itself.

Joseph Beuys says: 'Show your wound'.

Where is the goodness in me, and if it is only named and made by the world, where is the goodness in the world?

Sunday March 22nd

I'm installed very comfortably in the Ainslie Place mezzanine flat between the ground and first floors. Actually it's only a room with recesses for loo and basin, shelves and cupboards, and the ceiling is so low that I have to stoop to avoid chiming against the beams. A cottagey feel; clematis frames the window, there is a drop to the Water of Lethe, the familiar childhood vista on privilege, hush and enclosure. Inside, everything is clean, white and to hand. I cannot be reached from the street because there is a great locking door and no bell. It is hermetic: my reputation secured it for me.

Argument with Douglas Ashmeade: he tries to rationalise nuclear defence policy. As he became more worked up (but no less convinced of his case) everyone

began to worry about his heart condition and made feeble conciliatory remarks. Mother unleashed her resentment of the whole business of institutionalised aggression, and I supported her, but conceded more to technicalities of logic. But are these any use at all here? Perhaps I divide intuition and intellect against the interests of myself and humanity. Keith, when he met Douglas, instantly sensed his hawkishness, and was repelled.

Monday March 23rd

The owner stood flat against the door so that the young man could pass into the room. Both stood for a while, the owner looking at the young man, the young man looking around the room. 'It's all very fine,' said the young man at last, 'very fine indeed. But what is it you want in return?' The owner smiled and pressed his narrow lips together. 'You're ignoring the view,' he said.

Tuesday March 24th

There is a problem with this living-place circumscribed by childhood. It gestures childhood's gauzes back into place. It obscures a townscape of alienates and plate-glass barricades: cardboard girls giving head to personal products, derelict snoozers shaken out of sleep by policemen, the blasé glossy drifters and the pointlessly purposeful, the endlessly-eating-always-hungry. And this catalogues just those who display themselves: the 'nice' lurk at home within their multi-layered hardened sediment. They make their underwear into lace curtains and invite guests to sniff it.

Wednesday March 25th

Filled with the light filtered through the venetian blinds, this white and tastefully-furnished space is the platonic idea of my room. Outside ladies walk undersize dogs and those businessmen do business loudly, but all are left behind when the big black door heaves back into place. Then a cool greeny crossing of the chessboard hall brings me to the gloom of a great oval mirror, and distant light falls on selected parts of my face as I search for my key.

Returned from today's foray with three worn volumes of Rilke: a prose collection, a poetry collection, a letter collection. And posted some words to Ian Stephen, a puffy construction of my impressions of Edinburgh, saved only by interruptions of recorded self-doubt. Read D.J. Enright's excellent 'K. on the Moon': 'The moon is made of literature.'

Thursday March 26th

Reading Rilke (especially the 'Book of Images') has made me consider for the first time the possibility that poetry might be a serious option for me. The most immediate objection is the political one; the elitism of infolding. But this is compensated by the delicacy of the form, which animates its protest the more effectively by the extent of its difference from the world's violence. This is what draws me to Webern's 'Five Pieces for Orchestra', why they make a more concise political argument (helped by the circumstances of Webern's death, it's true) than Schoenberg's 'A Survivor of Warsaw' or, worlds apart, The Gang of Four. Yet I cling to the thought that it is better to strive towards purity and implicitness in a medium which does not embody these virtues than simply to follow the code — be predictably sensitive and stylised. It's better to surprise. A gesture towards the impossible is more effectively launched from the mundane and banal than the refined and hermetic, which are already halfway there, and thus have twice as much suggestion to do. This displacement, of course, doesn't abandon poetry, but does it the honour of being discovered anew. It is like moving house in order to relish one's true home on revelatory visits.

Klee's diaries, while on second acquaintance seeming shallow and complacent (not to mention anal retentive), teach me this: there is respite as well as improvement in the patient, religious practice of one's art. That said, I trust far more Rilke's restless seriousness, his application to the higher matters of philosophy. They have in common a dislike of virtuosity and an uncertainty about what constitutes 'good technique'. This is very healthy as long as it doesn't verge on aesthetic nihilism, as it sometimes does in my case.

What I must develop is the *practical* outcome of a religious relation to my own creativity. It is hardest to respect what one thinks one knows. A leap of faith is required, for only this will allow me to surprise myself into finding that faith valid. *'Il faut toujours travailler.'*

But what has just spoken so sincerely is simply one of the characters in me. Others vie noisily, and some have the low advantage of being in league with the body (which has its good advocates too). So although this case is plead so irrefutably, the others are waiting impatiently in line, casting their shadows across virgin days, each with equally water-tight positions. The only advantage the writer has over the others is that his case has parts for them all. But more than eloquence is needed to make them submit. They must realise that such unity, albeit subordinated, is their only hope of survival. The alternative is chaos.

'Brothers, we cannot ignore the possibility that the last speaker was not, as he claimed, the writer. Clever he certainly was, but did you notice the pedantry of his prose? And why did he speak of writing as an imperative for the future — was it no more than a fine aspiration for him? Yet we know that a *real* writer is not a weather forecaster of the psyche, not a petty mayor making a speech before he unveils the town's latest statue — no, a *real* writer is one whose skin is paper, whose blood is ink. Observe, brothers, the pallor of my skin! Observe, as I draw this razor across my finger-tip...'

(The Judge rules: the more chaotic the diversity, the sounder the unity. But was it really the Judge? Meanwhile, conversing in the wings, William Blake and Erich Fromm discover they have more in common than they thought.)

Friday March 27th

I have always wanted to live in an art gallery, and now I do. Admittedly the works are only postcard-sized, and certain necessary piece of furniture stand on the floor (which is not of creaky wooden tiles). Yet the atmosphere is certainly religious, so that the intuition of a neighbour's television hinting forced laughter makes the air itself swell with indignation.

The favourite exhibition in this gallery is Kirchner. The walls boast 18 of his works. His colouring is so vital it puts nature to shame. His pure joy in his work is an example to us all. His knowing young women would never consent to being a harem: they are not models, not pictures, but proud consciences of the flesh — they force a unity between mind and body, they are not hostesses but harpies of mercy.

It is significant that I don't feel any *physical* distaste when I consider that writers and painters might just be, not so much ideologists for, but humanisers of the bourgeois, the business class? Intellectually I will rage if I can't outmanoeuvre the idea, but beneath the surface it seems more a fury against my own capacity to compromise than against the artist's position. I am plunged irrevocably in a bourgeois milieu, and although the Douglas Ashmeades and Mrs Thomsons of this world only strengthen my rebellion in their attempts to socialise me, yet I see more in them, as humans, as clusters of conflicting determinism and potentiality, as mortals and hurtables, than their (often ludicrously sclerotic) attitudes. But does this necessary, forgivable forgiveness not blind me to the cause of others, those on the receiving end of the inconsistencies and injustices of bourgeois ideology — out of sight, out of mind? Undoubtedly Hitler had a certain pathos of personality which could even have made him attractive to those who would otherwise have understood the absolute nature of the threat he posed.

So I cannot become complacent in my attitude of negative dialectic, clinging to the coat tails of the top-hatted. Writing has seemed to me a haven of autonomy, something inalienable. But the rumour that the moon is made of literature is only current on earth. Not even — least of all — is the lunatic exempt from the vagrant mythologies of social relations. Example: this room. The Simms said to Father, and Father repeated endlessly to me when he put this room, which nestles part and parcel under his flat, at my disposal: 'This is the perfect writer's room.' And I agreed, pleased at their consideration. But now my autonomy is made dependent on Father's approval. Whereas previously I could argue that a university degree was not important to me, that all I needed was a room and

paper somewhere, that I was therefore independent — now these firm arguments have been turned against me in the interests of compromise: ‘you will sit your exams or I will throw you out of your writer’s room’. Father has already laid the first hints of this blackmail by the comment: ‘This would be a good place for a washing-machine.’ To which I replied ironically ‘I know I can never match a machine,’ thereby making explicit the underlying demand: that I should work mechanically at my ‘duties’, and so submit (by omission, like the majority) to the dominant ideology, as well as feeling the characteristic insecurity of the alienated labourers of this age; the fear of being replaced by a machine.

So it is all the more important, for my survival as one unalienated, to draw through myself the habits and security of the writer I am (although I am too aware of cultural relativity and the arbitrariness of role to call it destiny or necessity — it is simply the best and most apt and adjustive destination for me) so that they join the storeys of my soul like galleries and stairs. For this I can *use* the room as an aid, but must avoid becoming dependent on it. For all its comforting appearance of perfection (‘the Platonic idea of a room’, ‘living in a gallery’), it must be a mere meliorative — not between the world and writing, with my head in the overlap’s noose, but between writing (ie me) and the world (ie our source). And if he does his introducing well enough, the host can be dispensed with.

(If this is filial ingratitude, gratitude is a crime against humanity.)

Saturday March 28th

When I arrived yesterday at the Thomsons, John was helping his father to drain homebrew from a large tank into bottles. The valve tubes, the yellowish liquid, the filling bottles, the comment that the dregs were put on the garden as ‘excellent fertiliser’, all made the process redolent of micturition. I had to stand by, desperately unoccupied, while this hobby, strumped into the category of chore, was conducted.

A little conversation passed, on the subject of university. I put forward the idea that the early 20s were the worst time to be educated, because it was then that attitudes crystallised and personal development was paramount. Then I suggested that perhaps it was precisely for this reason that this age was chosen. After a pause, Jock smiled vaguely and said, never lifting his eyes from the job at hand, ‘I think that’s special pleading’. I continued hesitantly, but the conversation was killed when Jock ordered John to fetch more bottles. This kind of response is outrageous, and one needs to call on feats of dissimulation to hide one’s mystification and frustration that people can believe one so little present as to be so easily dismissed. Let’s not generalise the activity, calling it physical absorption as opposed to mental, but say: ‘He was making beer.’ To drink alone? To appreciate for its own sake? To share with friends? But of course the making is part of the satisfaction. One gains pleasure by storing up pleasure. No matter that the moment of satisfaction is itself hollow and insignificant, and that the whole activity is just a means of avoiding confrontation with the moment. It is after all a leisure *pursuit*: 22 is never caught.

But how pervasive this kind of displacement of the living of the moment is! And how convincingly the aura of necessity decks itself around the ‘activity’! Mother is willing to allow any aesthetic feelings she has been annexed by the demands of maintaining appearances: one tries to live by the impossible presentation standards of Vogue, and then calls laundry, ironing etc a hard necessity, something more essential to human existence than, say, reading a book.

And I, who continually protest my desire to do nothing other than write, am called upon not to produce my latest story (which is read only with the greatest reluctance, never commented on, and treated like some underhand ideological barb at best, whimsy at worst) but to carry large piles of books from property to property, books which Mother gives no impression of having read, for their effect has been safely confined to a sterilised compartment of her mind marked ‘literature’.

‘Why does one have children if not to appreciate what they have to offer, not in terms of household chores, but in character, imagination...?’ I asked. Mother

replied 'It's a matter of biological urge. Family planning is a very recent thing.' This would be hurtful if it had not been so long evident in her attitude. 'Having children has wasted twenty years of my life,' she once said to us, as if proud of her masochism.

What does one do with a body? It's needed to support itself (full time). But the purpose of this support (which is not just the mind) needs it (full time) too. To write, one must either employ a masochistic helper (like Beckett's wife) or split the body's allegiance and suffer the consequences. When I saw Ted Hughes once on TV I was impressed by the unity of his poetry and his body: because one was devoted to the other, neither could risk the sterility of being devoted entirely to itself. I agree with Nietzsche when he says 'Art is the message tapped out by the nervous system'. But this is at an individual level. If the artist is 'supported' by a society which, suspiciously, regards him as its conscience, and if he is therefore put out of physiological relation with the 'body' of that society, surely the same compartmental sterility will be the result? Art cannot tolerate any degree of specialisation, that is, it cannot take its role, techniques, effects for granted. Art is held in place by two opposing forces: the desire to give purpose to the efforts of the body, and the desire to be independent from them. If this conflict were resolved, art would no longer be needed.

If art is anything like a mirror, it is in this way: it shows the body how it looks from outside. The effect is a mixture of vanity and horror.

God, I don't want to be a theorist. Theory is the most trite and vain of the nervous system's tendencies. It is best formulated after its object, descriptively, rather than prescriptively. Then it is best forgotten.

I drift into theory only because my vocabulary is at present imbalanced: terms of psychoanalysis, philosophy, other academic disciplines, each one flirting with my laziness because it is the tip of a pyramid of knowledge, vie with the effort of primal expression, the improvisation on common words which don't require a convoy of text-beating experts to legitimate it. This thing education, which only provides us with ways of stilling thought! And dismissing feeling.

But you need a rational equipment to hold before yourself the poverty of rationality.

Monday March 30th

My writing comes of necessity here, but the necessity is that of therapy; a way of holding my own against the brute intrusions of outer necessity: moving other people's possessions from place to place, making friendly noises to Babis (who arrived here yesterday), trailing through the city following his whims and improvising my own in a struggle to balance the power. B is an enormously demanding friend — he wants to manipulate me like a puppet, and so he can't help crushing the thing he wants to appreciate.

What an awful, mangled equation is formed by the human relations in which I'm implicated! What is asked of me is asked, not on the basis of what I can give, but what different others require. What is given in return is given, not on the basis of what I require, but what others would like to give, in order to make me what they would like me to be. My defensive marginality betrays me — formulated to give me solitude and invisibility, it makes me, in my outer inconsequentiality, a doormat for others to trample. Not that this exonerates trampling as a universal behaviour — people do it because they have happily made themselves the scraping place for boots with dreamy inner correspondences in themselves, in their self-degradation which goes by the name 'aspiration' — the opposite of respiration; the unforced, reflective breathing of the soul.

But I too aspire, and dizzy myself with looking up something which, I should realise, can only be scaled by the patient work of the here and now. Allow time and place entrance and mingling in self, and pure exhalation (expression) will keep one fluid and abreast, advancing and at rest.

Thursday April 2nd

The more restricted and transparent language is and seems, the more it fulfils its function: to give us the impression that we understand one another (and ourselves). But to believe that this is possible is to misunderstand language. It is left to those who have given themselves entirely to language (that is, the instrument of institutionalised, merry misunderstanding) to demonstrate its inadequacy by breaking beyond the banal tautologies of ordinary conversation and journalism.

In the way they use language, most people are like twins — they have two selves: the first experiences things immediately and unceasingly, and also senses the inner vibrations of the body and intuition; this is the sighted self. The second speaks, occasionally hears the nonsense whispers of its brother and encodes them in intelligible words, which it passes on to others in its extraverted way; this is the blind self. The writer cannot afford to be split in this way (which is devised for comfort and manageability). For long periods his blind self is also dumb, as language is made to flow upstream to its source in experience and intuition. But this journey does not just stop at the birthpoint of language (which is really the outer boundary of the social) — it pushes further, as form, in its attempt to merge with content, betrays itself. Here it becomes a turbulent passage for the expeditionary forces as the incomprehensible rushes on every side and any flagging of pace means the destruction of the integrity — the raft, as it were — of the forces; an integrity which is required for their safe return. Such destruction of integrity, in terms of language, appears as obscurity; the privately opaque (as opposed to the hidden opacity of purely social language). It's not the aim of this incursion into strangeness to claim and name new land for the social — the explorers are more anarchists than imperialists, they seek to deplete the social by breaching its artificial enclosure. They don't want simply to 'create a stir' or even revitalise stagnant waters, but lower the whole self-referring pool (its fatal flaw was that it could not erase *all* reference to otherness, nor break with memories still being compiled) and admit the healing turmoil again. They are destructive, certainly, but what they sabotage is not only their own deaths, but the individual death of the greatest part of each of the greatest number.

This is, of course, theory, but I hope that past praxis (ie 'The Derelict') has rendered it redundant, and so made of it the Achilles heel of the enemy: the dissatisfied longing that is forever scanning the horizon from the ramparts, looking for the promised wooden horse.

There is an insidious, sourceless vibration running through the building, an orphaned anxiety amok in my body, and a rumour of dread passing round the world (which the Americans, to break the silence, have named 'Poland').

Note on theory: Adorno distinguishes between immanent and transcendent theory. Immanent theory accounts for intrusions like literature in terms of the prevalent tautologies, and so socialises the influx, tries to make it harmless. Transcendent theory is the kind I'm interested in; which I've characterised as the longing on the ramparts. But like all confounded expansion, such theory is an unsatisfactory compromise between determinism and necessity. Perhaps with (or on behalf of) literature it recognises that necessity must outweigh determinism, but is unable to act because its position is eternally locked in negative dialectic with determinism. Perhaps, too, literature itself is bound to this negative dialectic. But whereas theory sees literature and little more, literature, either by its position on the ramparts or its powers of vision, is able to survey the infinite play of possibility and, by dint of its self-consciousness (reflexive relation to what lies behind) can strike the sparks of meaning in fiction. Bound, then, but saved by the third dimension.

(Tint, tinder, flint, dint, fiction, spark, fiction.) Images from prehistory and preconsciousness. How theory leans towards its end!

Saturday April 4th

In the Botanic Gardens I approached a man who was bullying a frozen, defensively impassive woman. She kept her back to me, stood close to the locked hothouse door. 'Oh fuck off,' the man said sarcastically, then saw me and said 'Oh, sorry,' then, embarrassed, to the woman: 'What I was saying before, you don't think I meant that seriously, do you?'

Quickly but imperceptibly the penetrating, jumping sunlight departs the plant beds, and only the even cool of shade remains.

Don't denigrate your own reluctance. It is what provides you with style: the art of deciding what material is permissible.

A book on personal development really shook me up. Then I considered that the author (a rather puritanical psychoanalyst) had not yet reached the age at which it is possible to look back at a life and say, no, it did *not* have to be that way. But perhaps this is more characteristic of prospect than retrospect. Perhaps the writer was never young.

I am a temple, and happy voices do not sit well within me. But when they hang weakly in the distance, that is appropriate and even beautiful.

The birds sing with such joy because myriad fresh insects have been hatched to grace their palates.

Art — the pull between inner and outer.

These peaceful, serene gardens are a delight to be in, but from outside appear almost frightening. The hopefulness we feel on leaving them and being better adjusted amongst planes of functional stone and glass than amongst the arranged but anarchistic sprays of stems, blossoms and leaves, is like a sickness, not for, but *with* home. We understand sweet-papers better than leaves.

A sparrow lands on a springing bamboo branch. Its neck stretches and contracts with the swaying of the branch. When it lands on the ground it pecks more happily when I make small movements than when, still, I watch it. Its faith in me is no less extraordinary than the sudden, apparently sourceless, collective flurry of panic which has the birds pelting for cover. Sometimes a single bird ignores the rumour of danger, but its heightened wariness never allows it to weather the many signals of unease that assail it, and soon it too evaporates upwards with

rattling wings. Nature is no less anxious than we. But being so close to death, it is fortunate enough not to see it with our terrified objectivity.

These ideas can't be packaged (into bad poetry, for instance) because they are already covers to enhance and hide me. (And only from myself, because I'm already hidden from others). Is art a cure for sickness? No, only life can be that. Art is the celebration of this 'sickness', and, given enough faith, a celebration of life.

Didn't even Rilke sometimes feel that he was just a piece of flotsam, not worthy of expressing nicely-turned platitudes, or that writing was a cultural confidence trick, or that the world would invariably trivialise the things which he felt justified his faith? Faith — he had faith, which is not conditional, is the dispensing with all conditions: not a condition of action, but an act itself. Perhaps the only purposeful act.

Sunday April 5th

I walked around the empty streets with Keith, who performed miracles with anecdotes in order to keep me feigning lightheartedness. I didn't presume to show things in their true light, and so the fireworks of his talk grew damp and fatigued, with being so hollowly applauded. In return I played him my 'Innermost Thoughts' song tape, which gave a mechanical reproduction of my private being. As if to communicate the effect this had on him, Keith showed me the picture of 'Grauballe Man' in my Beuys book: the shrivelled and preserved black corpse lies in an awkward sleeping position, its head twisted secretively away, hogging meaninglessly personal dreams.

Art is a door, through the opening of which you must allow the world to come and inhabit you. But you must have patience with the apparent equivocation; neither in nor out. Step through the door and the world grabs and uses you. Close the door and your self puffs into a great gourd of emptiness. There is no comfort in the fact that neither choice is possible. It just means that the

tendencies towards both are unavoidable. So patience is the mask of resistance, which is the means of measurement, which is the start of transcendence.

Monday April 6th

From this white point of view (furnished with the little necessities of life, like pictures and music, to ease the inhabitant to and from the threshold) you wouldn't know that all around cars are queuing to make endless right turns, nor that people are striving to believe in the necessity of their miseries and labours. All you survey is a frontage proportioned with dignity but betraying by its compactness and the expression of its features an unmistakable unease — that and a minute creature galloping along one of the red paths cut into the green slope of the cautiously amorphous gardens opposite; a little boy whose speed can only be measured against the speed of the watchful mother behind.

Reflexivity here is folded in on itself so many times that it loses its power to clarify and only confuses. The city is a joke so well schooled in the conventions of jokes that it takes itself seriously. So that the end of this delusion is never reached, the punchline has been discreetly dismantled. The circuitous telling, performed by the traffic, is neither means nor end, but a smug, self-deceptive perpetuity.

Down in the cleft the trees were crooked, cracked by heat and the passage of monkeys. At the bottom, between the earth slopes with their exposed green rocks, ran the straight, bright path, like a sign or a law in the green. Promenaders called their children, who were not yet domesticated in the full extent of their being, back from the sticky curiosities of the soil to the meticulously engineered blandness of the path.

Our ambition should be to overcome all schooling, then to put the school squarely before us and watch its emptiness.

Wednesday April 8th

As I write, B, a smelly heap, lies fully clothed and snoring on my bed. He is covered in chicken-pox spots. Their first intrusion into my sanctuary came on Sunday in the form of a note: 'Nicholas, guess what, I have chicken pox, please phone.' The next stage was of sympathy, the next ministrations and counselling, followed by the agreement that B could leave his rucksack in my outer cupboard, followed by concession to his need to rest while C and I bought groceries for him, leading to his present burrowed-in state.

B is an invalid by vocation, innately suited to receiving undivided attention and justifying it with generous measures of helplessness. Obviously he is marked off from the rest of us; one of the chosen ones who clearly level the misfortune of self-sufficiency by taking upon themselves (and returning to the void) a hefty part of its burden. Without people of such moral stature, how could the rest of us tolerate our lack of affliction? How could we prevent our gaze from falling on the *real* sufferers, the really choking diseases such as the sclerosis of emotion?

The charity which starts at home finishes there. Or is this one of Blake's Hellish Proverbs?

Everything stems from the separation of body and mind. It is legitimate to work with, and minister to, the body: as long as one is restoring things to their previous state of safe repair, all is well. If once calls 'health' a variety of sickness which is useful only to a minority somewhere, one is making, not executing, work. Which, after all, is a gift of Durkheim's god, and so beyond question.

Thursday April 9th

With Keith to opening of 'Multiples' at City Art Centre. At first only sturdy bourgeois thronged the upstairs section, but then the art school faction arrived. As the evening wore on, we got to talking with one group — a girl, 'Catty', as she introduced herself, had replaced the electronic scribble soundtrack to one exhibit with Mikey Dread dub. When I brought K over to listen, she came up and started speaking to me. Cropped dark hair, a puritanical but attractive face, black tooth-shaped beads, a greyish little-girl's dress. Strange mixture of bold and shy

— she moved her head about level with my chest as she spoke, looking only at my feet. Soon transferred her interest to Keith when she heard that I was doing literature; she's a graphics student at Edinburgh, about to graduate in 6 weeks. Terrible to tear myself away (to the Traverse bar with K) after such an ideal but inconclusive meeting. But perhaps I misread the signals such people give — her 'creative' and serious appearance are perhaps the more superficial art school norms.

Conversation last night with Elspeth Davie, who advised patience at university. Yet she herself dropped out of Englit in favour of art school!

Investigations into Jung, esp. on intuitive introversion.

Visit to the enchanted museum, its big white hall packed with planes and spindles of scaffolding, in which painters whistle and sing softly. The soothing views of empty space — moors, coastlines, from the air — in the Geology section. Sunlight in the highest galleries, the forgiving diffusion of passions borne on the air as cries. The space in showcases a simple space against which is strewn a ghastly, fertile subconscious-full of irrational, distasteful objects; all separated, neutralised.

Torment to discover that attractive women do, after all, exist — are not just billboards come to life. The words congeal, impotent: 'attractive woman', the imagination does not suffice to put the feeling, thinking being before one. All women are creative. Their advantage (perhaps only a fleeting one) is that this is expected of them; that the making of new life is taken for granted. We men must struggle ceaselessly to imitate the miracle. Our only aid is that our material cannot take life, so we are freed from the dangers of complacency.

The inadequacy of these notations seen against relation.

Saturday April 11th

The sheriff saw with a fizzle of unease the red A in its tight circle, sprayed on the wall of the court where he exercised the law.

One can choose to look down from such a great height that one is small, or from the great height of one's head, at the whole empires of detail scattered within one square foot.

They lived on the outskirts of the city, and knew that everything they clapped eyes on was a mark of their place on the necessary periphery.

Our blood is an ancient monument which has forgotten its purpose and circulates only for show. All the newness we try to impose is simply the attempt to speed a search into an unfinding blur.

The air grows cool. The eye-scars of the guardian birch acquire their wonted wilt.

Monday April 13th

I am not on my own side, and it's even likely that the spectacle I therefore provide myself with is pale like a cheap postcard. All is not for the best. The misfortune by which I set so much store by is only an obstinate mischief, and, if it registers anywhere, goes under its own real name, a name without imperatives to overtures. Somewhere a sulky little boy passes through a crowded room; familiar, unnoticed.

I have heard its voice
In the melancholy of the pine forest
Between the embankment
And a rumoured sea.
Now it loses its respect
Even for my fear
And, rearing through the lower branches,
Makes to show itself
In the shape of a vulture.

It has left me voice enough
To summon my companions
From the firm stone house —
But we understand each other,
It and me. For what else
Has our voice been calling?

Wednesday April 15th

Much time with Keith and Graham — lifts me then drops into a trough, from where there seems no possibility of salvation, a place where the substance of relation is the attempt to find transparent thrilling anecdotes, easily (but skillfully) wrapped and guided to sink home in the funny bone. In this our talk resembles the shopfronts and advertising hoardings we pass, the dress of monied walkers with filleted souls. And I yearn for less, hoping there to find, not these glancings, but a gaze, a common huddle with the world which is neither participant nor contemplative. I yearn to partake, to partemplate.

Small things, acts requiring will, have passed the stage of being difficult for me. They are beyond me. Something I *have* to do, for instance this Blake essay, assumes a growth of its own, a personality to which I bow in deference, whose superiority to myself is plain. I keep coming across allusions to Blake (two men standing in front of a Brandt photograph mention the 'dark Satanic mills'; R.D. Laing, in the passages most applicable to me, cites Blake; a bookshop displays Blake volumes in its window. . .) which only bring home to me my own inadequacy in the face of the task. And as the time allotted to write the essay diminishes, the likelihood of its being written shrinks too, instead of forcibly growing. Look, the circumstances — this room, this quiet, this privacy, this atmosphere — all seem perfect, yet the thing will not be done. I am not in it — how can I be when I crouch in its shadow? I have not the right to peer down, however respectfully, into the intricacies of the subject when its sheer bulk and proud opacity so belittle me. I, unacknowledged; it, revered, omnipresent, accepted even when misunderstood.

I toy with the idea of being psychoanalysed. Rilke thought of it as the sterilisation of the mind, something fatal to creativity. But perhaps the lack of such a catalyst would be equally fatal. My psyche is like a house of cards, and breezes, swirling around and through me, appear to be gathering force.

Somewhere within the span of this journal (from 1979 on) something happened — a thing no doubt long latent, coiled inside — to make me renounce the world. But the world is not so easily dismissed: on those who think they can elude its grip it effortlessly tightens its talons, allowing each struggle to inflict its own wounds.

But to undergo analysis would be to admit defeat. To be maladjusted is not necessarily to be wrong. The means by which one saves oneself in the face of great destructive forces can be the means by which those forces are defeated rather than simply placated.

Therapy is not enough. We require to be heroic.

Thursday April 16th

To journey back from our Z (Zarathustra?) to Adam's A one must first traverse the MAD.

Friday April 17th

This morning I dreamt about Ana Garcia Sarria (she was to take some message from the flat where we lived to Paula). This evening I met her at the Nite Club, and, with Keith, spent the whole evening with her and her friend — Josef K were playing. Between these linked events I read Laing's views of the importance of dreams ('Politics of Experience'), where I also came across another allusion to Blake, reminder that our acquaintance should not be forced, but must be welded, to deadline or not.

Talking about short stories, I said to Ana: 'the first rejection is always the worst.' Danced with her to The Cure's 'A Forest' and Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' amongst others. All this very adolescent: I note it because of the rather aesthetic appropriateness — form — of the circumstances.

We were talking about Paula's plans. She's now at Edinburgh College of Art. When she leaves she may take a postgrad course at the London Academy, then hopes to teach. 'But she'll have to hurry up,' said Ana, 'because she's always telling us she's going to die at 30!'

Tuesday April 21st

Aberdeen.

From the impact I make on fellow humans here I might be a prototype of a duck-billed platypus!

Extensive reading in psychoanalysis: Fairbairn's none-too-fair emphasis on bairns in his views of Schizoid traits of the personality; Jung's love of the notions of antiquity, permanence, balance; his fairness at least in my favour as an introverted intuitive, ie a being without any immediate practical import.

I begin to realise my willing enslavement to the dictates of my unconscious. I have yet to learn (or want?) effective sublimation, redirection of welling libidinal energy.

Thursday 23rd April

Snow lies stacked on blossom-bearing branches. My two essays behind me, I make forays into the primitive unconscious: first-hand life-stories from Uganda ('Beyond the Mountains of the Moon') and myths from New Guinea. Also the splendid Nonesuch gamelan record: ringing, springing tattoos, gripping rhythms, an electric dance-chant.

I meet Hanna on the library steps. After days of isolation and tension I cannot summon the ease to engage her in talk, and hurry off, bemused and abashed. Her two poems in the 'Scratchings' magazine (in which my 'Stadium Lights' also appears) go under her Belgian name; Hanna Mertens. As usual, I expect any valid drawing-together to happen of its own accord, or forever hold its peace.

A talk with Joy later, lasting over 3 hours, shook this resignation to dharma. We talked about inner / outer, models of reality, the possibility of freedom, our parents, isolation, my position. Joy suggested that I should take a year out to indulge my libidinous yearnings. Suddenly the possibility occurs, no, presents itself like a hidden talent, that I can and should be as creative with my own direction as with the formulation of protest against determinism. Fear and despair are easy options.

Saturday 25th April

I use books as sticking plaster for the crevices within. But this causes my attention to be distracted from the outward causes of these divides. To remedy this I pick only those texts which apply strictly to my dilemma. And so my explorations are narrow and narcissistic; they don't help me to escape the problem, but instead intensify and intellectualise it. I read a great deal of psychoanalysis (Jung, Kretschmer, Klein, Fairbairn...), I sound my dreams and perceptions for magical traces of the unconscious. To this end I also revel in primitivism; that of the moderns Kirchner and Klee; that of the savage musics of remote parts: Bali, Java, Ghana, Rhodesia, Timbuktu, Himalayas (Nonesuch sampler etc). Also the irrationalism of Australians Birthday Party. Yesterday read Ionesco's 'The Lesson'. I am, of course, like the Professor, swamped by the repressed clutter of primal urges, killing the dissatisfaction of my innocent self, murdering the anima which protests at the sterility of the algebra on which she is fed (toothache).

Such compensatory infusions are not without success — possibly even advantage. But recognition of this advantage reveals its harmful effect: alienation from

others leads to the need for a feeling of superiority, this aggression makes me afraid of their retribution, which increases alienation.

The ultimate 'advantage' — the only justification — in my hazy view of things is writing. But I shun it. Writing is a message, and tells others too much about aggressions which it cannot hide. It gave me no satisfaction, for example, to see 'The Night Watchman' published in Open Space. I was only consoled by the thought that no-one would read it. Its disgust with and fear of people was too clear. Such is the way with writing. You can't lie to yourself. If you are motivated to write by hate, it must remain a kind of private pornography. Issued, exhibited, its function changes: it becomes a cry for help. But such cries are betrayed by their articulation — they are rhetorical.

New tack: how I invent laws, either with a didactic intention (Change Thy Ways) or in attempts to justify my complacent despair. I've said this before. When I spoke to Joy, elaborating my view of the world, my position in relation to family and university, all these implicit laws became apparent. I mentioned dhurma: my frenzied celebration of torpor.

Torpor saunters to the centre of the stage. A spotlight shines on his glittering suit. There is lengthy applause, oscillating between crashing hand-spanking and the feeble rustling of skin, as of leaves in a light breeze. This continues uninterrupted until cleaners with buckets and brooms begin to mop methodically over the stage. When they reach Torpor they take off their topcoats to cool themselves, draping them over his glittering suit. One by one the members of the audience leave, each slightly dazed; surprised, in the traffic and drizzle outside, to be coming to himself. Several are nearly run over by cars, but no-one appears to be worried. For the raindrops are beginning to give their coats a glittering aspect, and each, in his solitude, starts to entertain small grey dreams.

Wednesday April 29th

Hanna has agreed to play Ann in the 'Derelict' video. My heart is in my mouth, and I must summon something from my emptiness before it recognises its own

void. Nothing: not writing, not reading, not music, not diaries, not solitary contemplation — is as important as simple relation with a sympathetic person. Yesterday she visited me here for 15 minutes. I failed to say all I had vaguely intended, and when she left I fell into a mood of despondency, alternating between tenderness and unbearable limbo — as if I were a skin of metal with insubstantial coloured light playing inside me, a thing without foundations or feelings. I visited Keith, drank red wine, watched TV with his overseas student flatmates. Returned after midnight, much better. A note from Hanna was in the door:

'Nicholas (Nick)

if you find a pair of hideous red bead earrings *please* bring them along to the Bobbin on Friday — they belong to an old lady I know

Hanna'

So she must have come back. The monstrous irony is that I had rushed after her when she first left, walking up and down Don Street, hanging around the entrance to one of the halls (where, also ironic, I met Petra, and confessed that I was having a 'down period'), mulling over coffee at the kitchen window, watching a bicycle I thought was hers... then putting it all behind me and walking down to Keith's.

I don't know how to live.

Friday May 1st

I am an arm protruding obscenely from a womb, waving for help to be born into the world. A second birth, the introduction to the complementary body I lack. But in that wave are contained many signs: a trembling, for the eyes within cannot conceive what light is like; a beckoning which seeks to reverse nature and bring the second body impossibly into the womb; and a refusal, an unfaithful

shrinking back, a gesture of incomprehension. What is the woman — the second woman — to make of it all?

We drink our goodbyes to McIlvanney in a peely-wally room above the Machar — a romantic place to be born. Hanna is there: I have brought her from the Bobbin, the original meeting-place. Anecdotes are batted to and fro like shuttle-cocks: the 'ladies' are anachronistically called to forgive one or two. I rest my head in crooked fingers and smile until I yearn to iron my face. Often I catch Hanna's eye, unable to tell if she is as disassociated from her smile as I am from mine. But she too tells little stories — in a quiet voice which expects rapt attention, narrowed eyes, an amused look, chin raised like a leopard's — stories which no-one quite knows how to take. Something in this attitude reminds me of Paula — but she is less ingenuous than P. She acts as if everyone is in love with her.

When she rises to leave, I ask if I can come with her. She agrees, invites me to her flat for coffee. We buy groceries on the way — I get two cooking apples for myself, wrapped in a bag like a grotesque metonym of male fertility. She has a single room with a view at the back over brick walls and blanked-out windows. National Gallery postcards, her own rather stodgy life sketches of nudes ('they're all too thin, so I've given up'), photographs, mirrors on the walls. When we arrive, some photographs of Easter in Angola are waiting. H's barrister father strikes a dynamic pose, showing off his white-streaked beard. He looks athletic and fierce. H sits by the swimming pool ('it's got algae') in a red t-shirt, looking plump, something like Bette Midler, while a tall black boy stands on a chair behind her and rests his arms on her shoulders. The streets of Luanda. A vulgar, Hollywood sunset.

We drink Darjeeling tea. I look at her in the wardrobe mirror, where she seems much closer than she does in the next chair. She says how 'triste' I look. I talk about my internal conversations, how they are out of sync with the real people they portray. When she asks — it seems like a crucial moment — why I've asked her to play Ann, I don't answer. She waits. I say 'It was partly a pretext. But I think you'd be good at it as well.' Then she looks at a comic postcard: a cartoon bride and groom have their picture taken in the back of a car marked 'Just

Married'. They look flatulent and despondent. H's laugh is savage and triumphant.

Just before I leave she gives me a book, 'The Old Believer' by Gilbert Phelps. She has agreed to see me next week. I am making for the door, when I suddenly wheel round and hit myself on the head with the book. 'There's something I have to say... no, I won't.' 'I'll see you next week,' she says. I leave the cooking apples on her table.

At the CWG ridiculous things are said, as if to mock my narcissism: Graeme Roberts says 'When Nick's famous, Scratchings will be worth a lot!' At the end, McIlvanney says 'I want you to keep in touch, Nicholas, because, even if you don't have any faith in yourself, I do.'

Let me note some consequences of love: energy comes to me; words come to me in expressive profusion; I notice myself in a mirror, and find I am a possible someone after all... even a desirable someone (in someone's eyes). But my sexuality is absent: it is like the absence of one's parents the day before one's birthday.

Sunday May 3rd

It is better to be hurt in so beautiful a way as this (Hanna goes home with someone tall after we have watched 'A Streetcar Named Desire' together) than to hammer oneself flat and impassive. Some have a talent for tragedy — why should they give up their sole pleasure? All they need fear is the success which one day will give them something real to lose, by taking themselves from themselves.

Monday May 4th

The desire to be a rolled hedgehog, safe from the world's jutting angularity.

Hail and a chill wind. I visit the Duthie Park hothouses. Warmth and humidity, an enclosed fantasy of parrots, tropical fish, green tree toads, lizards, bees, locusts,

chickens... derelicts, the disabled, ancient schizophrenics, young mobile noises, families deep in stagnation, unaware of their charms. Most parents can only issue orders, but one father sits on a bench before a pool of goldfish, caressing his little daughter, who sits still and quiet, with round eyes.

I read Rilke's 'Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge' — deep loneliness is the material of which it is built, and so it leaks away instead of mounting up, like a perfume which evaporates as soon as the air reaches it.

It seems decisively over with Hanna — no surprise, no great pain. The closest I felt was when I smelt her vaguely (or thought I did, for she was not always *there* at the time). Perhaps because it is confused with its memory, it is the smell which lasts longest, and to which any regrets attach themselves. 'Like can cans to the tail of a kite'.

What can I do with my sexuality? It seems to contain both ultimate redemption and ultimate damnation as oscillating possibilities: the first if I can reach out into a realm in which I hardly believe, and produce something from it like an old magician, the second if I slam all the doors in my head, wave only my fists through the windows, and content myself with kicking through ever-decreasing particles of dust... that is, misdirected, enfeebled lust.

The beginnings of a sexual crusade from which no single, innocent adventurer may return alive. No great battles kill these children, only starvation and methodical weakening of will.

Tuesday May 5th

Close before midnight last night I heard steps outside — they came and went. I ran after them, but they were far down the stairs. I sensed that it was Hanna. A note, which I discovered later, proved me right. 'Nick, I came up to see you but my better judgment prevailed (it's 12 o'clock) and I skadoodled. Hanna. I will see you soon.'

At lunchtime today, my hopes revived, I went to her flat. Her bicycle wasn't there, so I sat on the stairs and wrote a note which said: 'I came to see you but was almost relieved to find you out: I'm morose and gloomy, and would only weigh down your day like lead which has lost its faith in alchemy. Excuse the pompous style. So I sat on the stairs, listening to traffic and birdsong. You know as well as I do that the 'Derelict' script was not the reason for my visit. Now it appears that you have a lover, it is difficult to see what there could be between us. Hope is a cruel host: it doesn't let its guests leave — even if they want to. See how I turn even a simple note into an opus — proof that I don't know how to live. Narcissus.' When I had dropped it through her letterbox and was some way down the street — running footsteps behind: Hanna! I asked her to give the note back, but we went into her room and she read it, then threw it, crumpled, into the fireplace. Her knowing, touched smile. My awkwardness, shot through with little jolts of excited fluency. She is filing, but can't go on with it. We walk to the art gallery, see the exhibition (distractedly), sit in the coffee shop. I tell her how everything she does is liable to be interpreted by me as a symbol — she must be careful. The tension decreases. I ask if she had 'an exciting adolescence', then if this meeting doesn't remind her of then. No, it reminds her of a book, a childish romance. Then she rummages in her bag: 'I got a present for you in Woolworth's — it cost 50p.' It's a silver-coloured ring. 'But I'll interpret it as meaning something,' I protest — she makes to take it back, and I hastily accept it, meaning or not. She tells me how distracted she has been the last three days. She makes modest remarks — how did I arrive at my present state (of infatuation)?

She is 19... 'a baby,' she says. We go to the Marishall bus stop. Should she visit me? I say I want it, but am afraid of being hurt if things can't go further. She says she is 'comfortable' with Tim. For some reason this gives me hope.

She will be in Edinburgh in summer.

I sit between blossoming shrubs on the riverbank, the sun shines, it is almost warm. Life goes almost as it should. But nothing has substance. As if to protect the magic, it is forbidden to touch its fruits.

Wednesday May 6th

'Nicholas,

Today I bawled like a baby for the first time in years and I thought I was too old for that. With all the positive thinking I can manage I just can't see any way out. I'd like to have my cake and eat it but then you generally end up with nothing at all. If I'm honest I have to say that I'd hate myself if I left Tim or hurt him now. As it is I hate the situation — full of sad sad feelings and but but but — they're not much good though. If I'm not careful I could let myself think of you before myself — I'd do that easily. But in the long run as I say it would rebound on me. I wrote a much more eloquent little epistle yesterday but I threw it away. And although I agree that there's nothing worse than hope — a kind of vacuum out of nothing — I also know that I can keep a bit of hope to myself. I think I understand that you couldn't really do that — so now we have nothing to talk about or nothing "between us" as you put it but the script? If only it wasn't you I would know my mind — but it being so like a dream I can hardly keep myself in the realm of reality. I think I've managed only just.

If I could I'd kiss you because I thought quite a long time ago you need that.

I trust time.

Hanna

x

I feel like I haven't said enough but I don't want to write any more.'

Thursday May 7th

What is there without her? But no conception of what it might be like with her. A limbo: the streets between my room and hers. Neither of us is in.

Once, when I was nine and some people were visiting, Mother stroked my hair. I have never felt the same sensual calm since. Even in dreams, when I touch people they turn into insects. No wonder I live with ridiculous notions of romantic suffering — without them I would be face to face with my stupid laceration.

Friday May 8th

The first vaguely sexual dream I had recurred to me often. I must've been about 5. It was set in a class at nursery school. One of the girls came up and thrust a spear right through me. In gasps I asked her why she had done it. 'It's the spear of love,' she said. After that the pain was transformed to pleasure.

Since then I have chosen women on the basis of their promise as assassins.

Though I didn't see Hanna yesterday, I visited her house six times. Today (a misty spring day) I met her at the top of High Street. I said I could come with her to lunch. She said she was angry (belied by her smiles). I said 'Good — I need the energy of your anger: I just get apathetic.' But she said she would see me tomorrow, to 'brush me off'.

'I have to joke about it, otherwise I'll cry — I know you don't believe me, but that's what'll happen.'

'What'll I do with the rest of today?' I asked.

'What you did before.'

'I can't remember what I did before.'

She laughed.

'I can't remember what made it worth doing.'

We walked round the corner, then stopped again.

'Look,' I said, showing her my biography of Webern, 'I've regressed. Another biography of another artist. Artists don't need people, they sit in their rooms all day composing — words, music...' — she was looking at the bust shown in the frontispiece — '...and in the end they turn into stone.'

We parted.

I'm pinned on all sides by clichés: 'the suffering artist', 'the spring lover', 'the romantic student', 'the sensitive outsider', 'the third party', 'the rival'...

Perhaps to be summed up 'the untouched'.

Today she didn't reply to my self-pity but just brushed my hands with hers — not accidentally, but as if dressing the wound of a timid animal.

Saturday May 9th

Everything has changed. She no longer throws me scraps from the table: now we stand together.

— bleuch, who needs poetic intros? I was in her room, she touched my hair as she passed, then drew her hand over my face, then sat in my lap and kissed me — I kept trying to speak: 'It's bizarre, it doesn't feel real, it's like drowning...' but she silenced me.

Slowly she smoothed away my nervousness...

Back at my room, on the bed. Licking her neck. She complains that I bite her on the inside of her mouth. Tells me my hair smells of cinnamon. Feels the bumping of my heart, peeps through my shirt-front. We lean our heads together, hug each other... things which words shouldn't plunder.

She tells me it would be impossible to end it. When she sang 'Torn between two lovers' last week Tim cried. She is on both our sides, she says.

'You're like something from my subconscious,' she says.

'What, like the creature from the depths?'

'Yes. No. I don't have anything green and slimy in my subconscious.'

Sunday May 10th

And so to bed... between sheets more fragrant and crumpled than usual. Hanna came at 12 and left at 8.30.

...Lifting the hem of her tartan skirt...

...drawing garments over clammy skin...

...strewing...

...legs clench legs...

she is honey-golden all over (waist slightly whiter), breasts soft — twin volcanoes (!)...

...skin drawn back, it burns raw and sensitive...

...the primal lunging too physical, no abandonment to guiding pleasure...

...me dressed, H under covers, naked, me kissing her from a stoop by the bed, then her anger: 'Oh piss off!'...

...united again: 'You lovely person'...

...easier plunging but no pleasure...

Orgasms don't matter. We caress and wind about each other instead, and for hours.

Coffee, cigarette smoke, breath, blurred faces.

Rustling of the papers of working neighbours. The bed bleats our secret.

Her long narrow eyes, chinking at me. We gaze and break into a mutual smile. My lips walk round her face, surveying soft warm terrain, taking trembling readings.

Explorations of a macrocosm.

She tells me about past lovers. A bastard's gallery, some nonetheless revered still.

She likes passivity in men, propounds universal bisexuality. I lie back and she dips from above.

Moves me with a grip of my hair, calls me honey. Speaks of the desire to be a 'harlot' — but then becomes a bewildered-looking little Belgian girl, temporarily relieved of her checked gingham. We pull the orange blanket tent-like over us, sit as if in a tub, smile like shy children.

Later, arm-wrestle on the floor — I win... just.

When I go for meals, she read through the diary, then greets me with 'I've been being a nosey bitch!' 'Oh, but I expected you to read it. I'm glad...'

How simple and calming to caress between sentences. A whole grammar of sympathy. Words in comparison fly about uncertainly, concerned to avoid unpredictable distancings.

Monday May 11th

The second day of my life.

Tuesday May 12th

Terrible uncertainty. Can I tolerate any connection with the casual and the everyday? When H said 'You'll find I'm a very boring person,' should I have taken her at her word? I contradicted her, but today she used certain inconsequential remarks as barbs, barbed wire between us. The video shooting, which began today, also parted us while we were physically close.

Wednesday May 13th

Avec cet essaie

*Je ne caresse pas me blessures
Et donc je suis sauvé... peut etre...*

'Come into my house!' I call, projecting my voice like a ventriloquist so that it seems to issue from a pair of spread arms which will only really be mine when she presents herself between them.

At the weekend she said 'With you, everything stops.' She also admired Kirchner's 'White Villa in Hamburg' postcard. I sent it to her today with this written on the back:

This is the house
Where everything stops.
See how the windows that grace it
Are only the trace of sad scrawls
Marked like tokens of sight on the walls.

When you arrive
Bearing stories and gifts
Beware of the path as it winds:
In appearance it seems to solicit
But it leads to the heart of a thicket.

Search for your host
In the grounds where he calls
In a voice with the tint of the sky
For the mansion has thrust him outside
Till he fills up its void with a bride.

I really dislike poetry's maudlin gait. There is no room in life for poetry. There is no dialectic with bustle and pain and stupidity, as there can be with prose. The prose writer can set off that dialectic by being on the side of what he writes. The poet is only on the side of writing. Everything described is made lacklustre by the words' brightness.

Hanna came this evening, we talked childishly, she taunting and affectionate by turns, me introducing serious notes with lines like 'It's better to be a fruit fly' — she was teasing one, then pressed it under her finger — 'than a mayfly, and copulate only once before dying, all in the month of May.' Then I showed her the lyric sheet of 'Prayers on Fire': 'Nick the stripper, hideous to the eye, he's a fat little insect...' — but she threw it away and accused me of being disgusting. Later, when she left, she said 'Goodbye fatty!'

We kissed a little, but she pulled away and said 'I'm getting too much affection these days. Tim's being really nice to me, you're being really nice to me, and I'm getting sick of it. I just want to talk to people.' She obviously has a bad conscience, for the affection she's getting is grounded in fear and insecurity — she's spinning us like plates on sticks, and we're trembling to maintain our balance, and therefore giving her less work to do keeping us up.

Thursday May 14th

Lose yourself in something so that you don't discover that there is no activity in which you would willingly find yourself.

Pavese's story 'The Idol' seemed apt today: the prostitute who sells her sex but flouts her lover.

Monday May 18th

Saturday and today (Monday) with Hanna. In bed with her without... 'consummation'. She taunts me (not about bed) and I vacillate between indifference and adoration. She is a 'difficult' person. Worries that she might be mad. Keeps making uncompromising noises — 'I could never go out with you', 'We'll have to stop seeing each other' — but takes them all back. She is affectionate towards me when I least expect it, then makes me feel, at other times, that I have no right to kiss her. The only place we really get on is side by

side in bed, when she tells me stories from her past. But she doesn't look at me then; her eyes face inwards.

Moment of panic: we are in her bed at 7.30 when a knock comes at the door. She thinks it's Tim. Begins, secretly, to pull clothes on, whispers to me: 'Get out of the bed!' I'm quite happy to wait in silence, but she seems intent on letting him in: 'I can't lie to him.' The visitor must hear these rustlings, for he opens the letter-box, stands outside for some time before leaving. Then H rushes outside to see who it was. Shouts 'Neil, Neil!', comes back in saying 'It was only a boy in my Economics lecture, he wanted some notes.' She is terrified, makes me feel her heart, and we huddle together, me smelling her fear, which is pleasant, and reminds me of orchids.

H's 1979 diary is full of little-girlish social details and happy exclamations. Love life verges on promiscuity ('I'm easy!' 'You're difficult!'). Then comes her solitary period in digs, and the notes become poetic; beautifully, articulately sad.

Supper with her in a King Street cafe with large, soft-coloured film-stars on the walls. We drink milk out of long, plastic shake glasses. The old waitress tells us about the pictures. H describes her visit with her father to this very place last winter. It brought home to him the difference between Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

The abuse she flings at me! I tell her: 'No-one has ever insulted me like this before.'

The yearning for higher things is not compromised by relationship. They can lie down with each other, and under favourable circumstances even preen.

Just as I am about to write something about aloneness (and how I need it) she knocks on the door. 'What're you doing?' 'Writing my diary.' 'Oh, you bastard!' 'But I have to be faithful to my diary. My relationship with it will outlast ours.'

Wednesday May 20th

I have substituted one kind of self-loss for another: risen from the darkness below the self to the light above, in which the self is revealed as paltry, yet kept in sight, played with. And, as usual, I am homesick for otherness. The view from above is too comprehensive, like a satellite picture in which every detail can be seen, but nothing understood. You think you can dispense with what is below you, but in fact your safety depends on descending into reacquaintance with it.

Painters keep appearing at my window: we are reciprocally startled.

Dream of a museum / department store (with Hanna).

Worries: that I am a romantic bourgeois; individualistic and anarchistic, and that I can't redeem these failings because above all I'm lazy, and too ensconced in futile privacy to support any practical dissolution. I have painstakingly exchanged the currency of my powers for personal tokens: Monopoly money.

Friday May 22nd

Because she is attached to me, I complicate Hanna's life: so she will not see me until the 'surprise' Edinburgh visit in a month or so. All well and good — that is today's arrangement. Yesterday, after I'd sat beside her, being anaesthetised by a lecture about the uncomplicated planes of Le Corbusier's architecture, we talked on a bench on an expanse of flagstones, beside the great concrete chimney of the New Library. The sun whitened everything, Hanna seemed pale beside me (her skirt was white). She applied herself ruthlessly to the demonstration of the difficulties I was causing her, she flagellated me with reproaches, she even slapped my face (it brought the relief of swelling sadness, tinging my self-protective vacancy). We were conspicuous — people were passing, Babis came up twice, and when a friend of hers approached and Hanna said 'I wish I could talk to this girl, but I can't... I followed the advice she'd just given: 'it would make life easier for me if you'd just piss off'. I spent the rest of the evening burrowed under my orange blanket, with my yellow curtains banning the sun. And, as is my wont at such times, objectified my hurt by reading a psychology text: Fenichel's 'Psychoanalytic Theory of Neuroses'.

This evening, when I had recovered and was committing myself to the taut, vital patters of Pavese's 'Among Women Only', she came and gave me a letter which, though firm, smoothed things over — '*affectionately* (not yours), Hanna, xxx' — and cashed its token kisses, so that our account, though settled, is not closed.

She remembers her dreams these days: I appear in them. 'You were in some restaurant and it was sweet. You were standing in the queue and you gave Durian a kiss. It was like you'd given up on me. Anyway you were with a very ugly actor. You said "Don't you know him, it's Jorgensen!" And I was so scared I ran away. Then I came back and he was a very nice man. But very ugly, and he said to me: "You know you must get away from dusty things and superficial aspects of people. You know that Nicholas here is a golden, good person." Anyway it was touching and nice.' (Jorgensen is really Babis, who came up to us yesterday and, leafing through my Rilke essay, murmured 'Very good, very good,' to H's amusement.)

The best writing erases the distinction between the pleasure principle & the reality principle. Pavese shows me how the strengths of fiction mingle with those of life, like children who refuse to stay in bed on the night of their parents' party, and, unnoticed but noticing, mix in with the guests.

Saturday May 23rd

My novel's neuroses, 'The Bitter Tea of General Zen', percussive music, archaic thinking, Cesare Pavese, Willem de Kooning — and suddenly I find myself walking across the centre of Hillhead's grass at 1.30am, alone with stars and birds and an extraordinary hereness, nowness; disorientingly in place and time. Otherwise I forget who I am and where I live, and become ensnared in unwinding reels of meaning, which draw me backwards to omnipotence instead of forwards into dependence.

Zheng, the Chinese flatmate, held a Chinese dinner this evening. I watched the 'Chinese' Kafka film. And in opposition to these antitheses, my image in the mirror suggested a destination and turned me into Hanna.

I need a more sparse prose style. Idea for this summer's novel — the overcoming of displacement from a 'reality' in which little faith can be had. A taut frame with strategic blurs is required, a pace and a core, with living objects and feelings to hint beyond...

The sort of person who's lost if you rearrange his furniture a bit.

Tuesday May 26th

Very silly solitude.

Plans for a summer novel. As yet lacking the right tone, the right tang.

Lazy; fatigued by firmness of hold on inadmissible urges.

How does he who lacks begin to gain? The first step — the most important — is work of the imagination, so that his deprivation comes clearly into view. This process can only be substituted by arduous, unenvious watching of the business around and about him. Perhaps this watching would be superior to the more fantastical accesses of the imagination.

Hypothetical fusion of Pavese's style in 'Among Women Only' and archaic significance of New Guinea myths. Edinburgh as Turin as Mount Hagen.

Wednesday May 27th

Spent the night in Hanna's room (but not her bed — except for an hour of morning drowse, not without tension). Very difficult to get on with her; she is 'testing' me, so I can do nothing spontaneous or right. Could I in any

circumstances of this kind? I lose the capacity to imagine how I could be happy with anyone. (Anyway, H is Tim's.)

Of my sealed-up life: not 'How did I get into this?' but 'How did I fail to get into *that*?' Answer: I didn't feel entitled...

An attraction vanishes stripped of blocking distractions. You wanted to understand 'life' in its full seriousness, so you brushed aside all the insignificant instances which are its fabric. No good turning back to them: your belief in root nothingness precludes necessary, simple faith.

No, I hold no such belief. And you can't turn back to what you haven't yet reached. So, prepare to live!

But I still can't kindle a taste for things, let alone the robustness to cease resisting them.

Seeing (out of the corner of his eye) that they were about to force it on him, he grabbed everything and hugged it to him, rejoicing.

So the secret of living is to enlist before you get drafted, just as only suicides master death.

Saturday May 30th

Bad times. Graham, Keith and Hanna are all out of town (H is at a cottage with Tim). I see no-one else. Read 'Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations & the Self' (Guntrip) and see little hope for myself without

- a) love
- b) analysis.

b) must come first: I've arranged a student health appointment for Monday morning to investigate the possibilities.

Brecht's 'Mother Courage & her Children'.

Monday June 1st

A new month — a new hope, crystallised in a photograph of Kirchner, delicate and clown-like, 'in the house of the Larches, watching dancing peasants, 1919-20'. The couple on the rough floorboards are a blur, a girl's ruddy face and spread, flat hand clutching a dark male shape, like an empty suit on a hanger. Kirchner stands at the side, before a wall two-deep in canvases, cigarette dangling from his sharp, dense mouth, a single curl on his forehead, his hands tentative and contemplative. He is beautiful but sexless, solitary but not lonely, an uncatchable variety of creature registering in the camera's flash only his comparative permanence, that is, distance from life.

This is a hope because it is a distance far superior to mine; a distance with credentials, which means something because it is measured from the centre of the blur, and has as its final intention the repayment (with interest) of the respect the blur has accorded it. My distance, on the other hand, is a distance only from itself. If therapy can effect a *rapprochement* within me, I can take possession of a legitimate and useful distance. My position at the edge will have a meaning because my work will lie behind me, two-deep.

With Hanna in the grass shavings under bleaching sunshine. She reviles me at almost every utterance, claims I give her a headache, spoil her day, upset her work. . . Is it guilt, or a ploy to make me give up hope? But when I tell her that I've arranged psychotherapy she seems jealous of it. She tells me to go away so many times that the request is devalued — and suddenly I comply, before she can change tack again.

Pavese's 'The Moon & the Bonfire'.

Saturday June 6th

With H yesterday to Max Frisch's 'The Fire-Raisers'. On the way, when I said 'I'm just your alternative' she became furious and started hitting me, saying she wasn't coming. At the interval we sat at the same table as a peculiar couple, mother and son. They had come in late: the son had sat down in the front row, but the mother, in a blue straw hat, had rushed up and hit him, pulling him back into the rows behind us, remonstrating. In the coffee room she was explaining to all and sundry: 'He's mentally retarded, you know; can't behave properly.' Hanna said loudly to me: 'I'm going to hit her in a minute.' Then, when the woman said to us 'He's mentally retarded,' Hanna replied 'I don't give a damn.' The woman started brushing imaginary crumbs from her son's lap. 'Why don't you just leave him alone,' said Hanna. Then, to me, 'Christ, she's the one who's mentally retarded.' She went to the loo for the rest of the interval.

Afterwards we went for a drink, and were taken for Americans.

This week, after seeing the doctor on Monday, I've been unreasonably elated. But now more realistic fatigue and inability to stick with any of the eight books I'm reading all at once. As always, Guntrip pins me down:

'One patient reported what is in fact quite a common symptom. He said, "I can't really settle myself to read a book. I think 'I'd like to read that' and I start it. Just when I begin to enjoy it I lose interest and think 'Oh! I don't want to go on with this. I'd rather read that other book.' I've got six books all on the go together just now, and can't give myself properly to any one of them to finish it." The bibliographic Don Juan is likely to collect and possess books without reading them. This schizoid fear of full self-committal accounts for much inability to concentrate attention in study.'

This is true also for writing — no sooner have I worked out the rudiments of a plot than I become sick with it, and start again. It's also true for relationships with people — and not just on my side. Yesterday Hanna said, explaining why she didn't want me to touch her: 'I know you now.'

Sunday June 7th

Another oscillation: last night H came and slept with me. Neither of us got more than three hours' rest all night. I had backache, H had stomach ache. Sex: a good bout in the early evening followed by long simmerings. Some friends of H's (one a flatmate of Tim's) were visiting Zheng. They asked H provocative questions. The flatmate came into my room 'to see the view' — our smell and H's rolled socks.

The half-intimacy, half-aloneness of sharing a bed: there are moments when you lie awake, and she seems to be asleep — yet you listen to a distant car engine, the hooting of an owl, dawn chorus, surreptitiously, as if you're stealing the sounds.

I don't know if I want a restored sense of object relations. Things and people aren't good *per se*. I'd rather clutch them with difficulty, extract them from the depths of abstraction, than write merrily across their surfaces, a mere beautician and restorer.

The pen is the first object I have to relate to. All further acquaintances with things and people are distractions, and so to be absorbed.

None of this is beautiful or new.

I sit in the distance between a crass poet on TV and a crass audience of bored viewers. Only the evening sky pleases me. At this rate I'll be fit only to be an academic.

Monday June 8th

Dropped the following into a plot and hoped for spontaneous generation: a hire-car driver, a wrestler father, an archaic consciousness, a race riot.

Shaman Beuys approached me, smiling, in a dream.

I must efface all media Britishness from my writing — the nauseous smugness, denial of passion, parochialism would clog it. I can write about Glasgow & Edinburgh (without being specific) as if they were meteors fixed to Britain only in the temporal random of a map's view.

How I envy the *lowness* of view of painting and music — a lowness which admits to the gaze nothing closer than the whole sky.

Hanna came just for long enough to pull down the portrait I drew of her yesterday and fold it angrily away. She says it 'isn't her' — it has an expression of cruelty. To me it looks more like cool desire, like a beautiful schizoid model in a magazine. The power of the icon... The prey erases the cave painting.

Tuesday June 9th

Gabriel Okara's 'The Voice'.

Brought the two Keiths to see Paul Keir's paintings — therapeutic brood-boards.

Friday June 12th

His complaint was that he lacked the things he had no time for. As a result all his time was theirs.

Do I mean people? My crime is lack of faith in relationships. The believer doesn't know the name of his own belief — I do nothing but invoke mine by theirs. No wonder then that faith is lacking. The belief named Art, taken at name-value: opposes itself to an active, unquestioning belief in relationship. The real activity implies no such opposition. That's why it's so logical that, with my 'total commitment' to writing, I should be unable to write. You have to write *for* someone. Only then can you apply the individualistic criteria which shape your work.

Angry opposition is a closer position to relationship than vulnerable 'indifference', my characteristic attitude. That I could write for the Machar 79 group shows this. Now the best I can do is brew plots which remain doodles on an internal memo pad, for there is no public scrutiny to give them momentum. Speech to which nobody replies can never become conversation — it just peters out, becomes silent and defensive, girds itself up for a fray which never comes.

Even if somebody *does* value the kind of writing I could do, do they impress me enough to make me concert my efforts on their behalf? Do they dupe me into believing the value to be universal and unconditional?

When I think about this, I consider 'rock' and the visual arts as possible alternatives. Not only is the feedback better, but these areas have a closer hold on the one legitimating quality of art: its visceral effect. With this in mind you understand thrillers and pornography very well — although you also see their fatal flaw: inflationary poverty. The gut which is being pummelled can't respond to subtle new frissons which reactivate archaic contours.

All this makes the cultural climate very important, even for the most individualistic art. In 1981 only 3% of the population reads serious modern novels of any sort; most of these have done 'Englit' at university. It is almost impossible to get a first novel published. Arts Council support for individual writers has been withdrawn. Anger is the only incentive — the anger of the kamikaze.

If only people wanted to fly rather than die!

Sunday June 14th

I'm a living (?) example of the futility of freedom (freedom, that is, which refuses to recognise its dependence). I exercise my liberty of movement by wandering the countryside on foot (yesterday forests and mist, today the airport and its wispy sky) — along the edges of tarmac bands, for inhuman distances, viewing

monotonous and repeating sights which are designed to be glimpsed at 70mph and instantly forgotten.

Concepts of beauty just don't apply to little sheds and suburban proletariat. You are emptied of cherished criteria of distinction and instead submit to the monumental practicality in all its ugliness. These little-used carriageways and industrial sites are less familiar than moonscapes, yet are your own roots, in a sense — the means of your subsistence. Their brutality, combined with their unquestionable necessity, holds you in frail fascination.

You, who set so much store by discrimination, must always break the bounds of any selection.

Suburbs are like last year's fashions — not distant enough to be costume (country) and so the furthest of all.

Could I be strong enough to remain myself in strange surroundings? And is that really strength, or just thick skin? And where, without books and friends, is not strange?

Wednesday June 17th

Hanna is resentful at having to stay on an extra week to do our video; distant from me. I emerge from anomie only to be seized by the excitement of our evenings of shooting in the art school library.

This morning I broke down in her room when she said 'I'm not just distant from you, I'm distant from Tim, and that's much worse. You might as well forget about me, Nick.' After that she changed her tone, comforted me, promised again to come and see me in Edinburgh.

Because of an inexplicable whine on the soundtrack — the last of many mishaps to befall the production — we have to abandon 'The Derelict'... probably for good. Our next project will be more visual, probably on film. In a way it's a relief:

the only machine I trust is the pen, and with that I don't have to compromise with camera operators about effects...

Saturday June 20th

'Lead me to a new world of comfort;
I think we know what's for the best.
I think it'll turn out rather well.'

Howard Devoto

Ensnared with Magazine in the mezzanine, exercising vigilance in expectation of Hanna.

Hatching a story, 'The Ghost in the Machine'. Laziness and a certain inability to ward off distaste counter progress.

This city is so extraordinarily geared to the smugness and naivete of the bourgeoisie that you almost wish popular front machine guns would appear on the roofs, like Beirut or a Ron Butlin short story.

Look, here's how I 'write': I seize upon a few details, places, feelings, psychological motions. I keep a framework which incorporates them in mind, making adjustments. I see how well other themes (which occur to me randomly, in order of importance) fit. I try to keep interest in the original scene, despite constantly fresh allurements. I usually fail, letting the first elements curdle and harden uselessly. The moral: I should write a story before it outlives its first glamour.

Concentration is a devil to summon.

Tuesday June 23rd

I came out of Mother's flat. The evening sun was yellowing Moray Place. A car came uncertainly round the corner. 'Here, chum,' called a large pair of square

sunglasses from the driving seat, 'tell me which is the quickest way out of this "Edinburgh" ... the A1, Glasgow, anywhere but this place.' I gave him a few suggestions, but he turned them all down, and took his glum family and Cortina slowly into Queen Street, throwing back a shout of frustration as he went.

I know the feeling. The city delights and stimulates me, but it also brings out all my negative, puritanical feelings. I am galvanised into political dissent not by ugliness, but smug and deceptive prettiness, tidiness, wealth. Inside every immaculately-pressed suit I see a selfish and parasitical hunter-gatherer. And amongst the deformed bodies at the Benefit Office I see simple souls curdled with stifled resentment. Edinburgh is an argument cast in stone.

Friday June 26th

Insects spiral in the rain
Birds spear the ground as if in pain
Business-people fraternise
But I sit thinking with my eyes.

My immersion in mythology and anthropology — in fact, in everything primitive — may be spurred by my acute distaste for, and inability to live in, this culture. But it is only one sweep in an oscillation which will bring me to the heart of bourgeois Edinburgh, equipped with nails at the end of my knowledge. Being able to formulate my deeply-felt condemnation of this culture depends on a preliminary extrication which brings home to me the portion of myself which previously I had projected (on parents, passersby, TV) and vilified. This is the admission necessary to force an active control of my own involvement in the culture, rather than the half-hearted disregard (the other half of the heart is always peering meekly over its shoulder) which is really dependence and subservience.

Saturday June 27th

I have already (perhaps) blotted Hanna's coming visit by anticipating it instead of living. How can I 'go about my business' when waiting *is* my business? Some things are so important that you have to treat them as trivial — you can take from them only what is your desert.

Wednesday July 8th

Father, before I leave after an evening in which Mother has brought her grievances sadly into the open, says 'I'm sorry you witnessed that scene — but it seems to happen every time Jo comes up here: she always leaves blubbing.' This shows that he has refused to understand (yet) that the best thing to do in the circumstances (which he admits are unbearable as they stand) is bring things out into the open. He doesn't want to do this because he recognises that at the end of this tendency lies the imperative of a radical change in his nature — 'I'd have to become as much like Graham as it is possible to get,' he says. 'But only in the most superficial way,' I say, 'of talking to Mother about things that interest her and showing her some affection.'

Just after Mother had left he spoke about 'the difficulty and dangers of relationships' — as if these made them untenable. When I suggested that it was possible to relish that difficulty and danger, he discounted it.

The thing he said with most passion was this: 'The way I see a marriage, or any close relationship, is this — you have to present yourself to the other person *as you are*, and if you can't be loved warts and all, you might as well abandon the whole thing.' I replied that people change; there's no such thing as a personality in a void, people are formed by their close relationships, and the process never finishes. But I could see that he thought I was lecturing him, and this was too great a reversal of our normal roles.

He said at one point that he could perhaps have made a better career as a geophysicist.

He lives in others' eyes — admits this and says it's good to acknowledge one's weaknesses. But one has no impression that he thinks it *is* a weakness. It's as if he's just making a gesture towards his spiritual homeland — the nineteenth century.

He said to me after Mother had left: 'You can't always give affection completely on cue, when somebody suddenly demands it of you.' This, apart from reminding me of the schizoid in / out (Rum-Tum-Tugger) conflict (which came up last weekend, when H wanted me to make love to her — instead we both cried at our situation when, first, she imagined I was simply being cold, then, I said 'I can't just have a little fling which is supposed to be fun right up to the last little minute'), also has Wife-of-Bathish implications: Mother's teenage clothes and make-up suggest a threatening overkill, a need to making ordinary affection racy and illicit and sexual in implication. A passage in her novel-draft goes something like this: 'Scots avert their eyes from attractive women as if they had all at some point been cruelly hurt by some vamp in frilly knickers.'

The writer of an apocalyptic (& potentially bestselling) book about Space War — which, very soon, will annihilate life-as-we-know-it, goes with his family to the beach, where they meet a PLESSEY executive. Writer & exec talk not about space hardware but good wine and the problems of bringing up young children. Writer is DEFERENT.

(This kind of thumbnail only shields soft living plasma. I should start with a great bare tract of skin, and only a splinter of the hard facts to irritate it into life.)

Friday July 10th

Making the best of a bad deal can just be a sclerotic & defensive refusal to learn from it. If one finds small comforts amidst great misfortunes one is perhaps less likely to use indignity as a potent upward propellor.

Riots and the ruination of 'the economic base' combine with the fracturing of family to give Summer 1981 a superficial gloss of apocalyptic disintegration. But

Sennett's book 'The Uses of Disorder' brings things into perspective — not by making the best of the bad but simply by asking the question: order, integration, for whom? For what? With what human consequences? The most alarming thing about disorder is that when it is controlled and hidden by governments, parents, institutions, it appears to be an unwelcome intrusion into an essentially harmonious world — an intrusion which can then justify all sorts of repressive 'counter-measures' (inverted commas because both temporarily acknowledged disorder and power's self-justifying antidote are part of the *same* strategy). Disorder is the gauge of the health of a society, a measure of the degree of its self-knowledge. Disorder is what results — or becomes, at last, obvious — when a class-in-itself becomes a class-for-itself, and a pre-requisite for this is the breathing-space required for the observation and thought that leads to this insight. Unemployment is this breathing-space. TV actually becomes a conspirator rather than stupefier when there is enough lived, unstructured experience (in all its comparative poverty) to set off a dialectic which leads directly to the previously muffled sting of relative deprivation.

In the same way, it took the experience of Graham to show Mother the abject poverty of her emotional rapport with Father, and the strangeness of his demands for absolute admiration. And it took the experience of Hanna to bring home to me home's distance, and how that couldn't reflect badly on a unit, a group of people (the family) which had never *intended* to include amongst its priorities complete emotional support of its members. In a way, I was the only one who really felt cheated because the family wasn't about recognition of its members as unique and *per se* valuable people — and I kept my disappointment quiet, preserved it as a stifled resentment, and so bound myself unnecessarily to grief over an *irrelevant* failing.

In fact, if the family *had* aimed at these ideals, and succeeded in some measure, how much less free I would have been, how bound to people whose influence on me would, for the worse, I think, have been that much stronger. In short, what a tight and (albeit benign) authoritarian structure I would have been bound to!

But the truth is that I was a beggar, and would have preferred (at times) anything to nothing. Also, I felt nostalgic for the ideal period of my first five years, when all attention seemed to be on me, without stultifying or limiting me. I felt, perhaps, that the continuation of that attention, so rudely displaced by the advent of E, might still be due to me, like some debt in a currency untouched by years of inflation and revaluation.

Saturday July 11th

You can suffer all the restrictions of identity of being a member of a large, powerful club to which you feel bound and which you support, without any *real* relationships with fellow club-members. Such is the condition of my membership of the youth / political / musical subculture — and the situation doesn't differ much from that of middle-aged bourgeois who, in their hazy insecurity, stand by the principles of neighbourhood and appropriate newspaper, without experiencing firsthand the social ties to the class whose values they endorse.

Cities are for extraverts. Noise, made by aggressive and de-sensitised people, makes aggression and decreased sensitivity the norm. The legitimate recreations — drinking whilst sharing loud volume with friends — are all (and increasingly so) extraverted: the introvert (whose own sensitivity suffers because he is preoccupied with petty complaints like headaches and fluttering nerves) can only take a few steps away from even feelings (actually unwarranted) of community in order to relish the new, oblique pleasures that complete estrangement offers. Example: looking into lit furniture shops and imagining disturbing plays taking place in their twee sets.

A crumpled carton on the path through the Meadows shouted 'Hi!' at me, despite its annihilation and my annoyance.

A letter from Hanna (with the very inspiring line: 'I thought I could be happy with you + I still think I could...') read like intercepted mail to someone one envies.

Sunday July 12th

Dream: I'm a member of a cliquy puritanical sect. The boss paints sterile canvases which pertain to rules. Live in a much-changed Hillhead. Seaton Park a desert patrolled by police. Illicitly, I escape and ascend to the sky.

Bookstalls and refectories. Leafy avenues waiting for buses. Plays which take place in renovated feudal mansions. I ask to see W.H. Auden's initials carved on the lavatory seat of one. An outdoor roller-skating rink full of noisy girls. Theological debate.

Cool temple cylinders. But all too pure — devoid of what oughtn't to make you vacant.

What makes day-to-day life worthwhile for people? The play of lure and resistance, risk and safety, self-denial and indulgence. But above all people have to believe in the furniture of their lives; believe that, ultimately, things fit together, and that, immediately, activities, places and situations have a general worth perceived and corroborated by other people.

These are the beliefs I lack. This is because my passion has always been to try to increase (so it seemed) the reality of things by going beyond their mythical, functional worth, to a point where ambiguity and conflict dissolved their contours. This always seemed like a victory, and, more, a first step on an original, significant journey to expression. If things were only real for others because they were simple and unquestioned, they only became real for me by revealing their fallible complexity.

Stripped thus of the simple faith I never had (being too suspicious and egocentric), I nonetheless failed to grasp the contingency of all human affairs in such a way that, with pragmatism, I could enter into them in a spirit of irony. For it seemed that if the irrational, ambiguous, and conflicting elements of all activity could be incorporated into the *intentions* of a specific activity, one could dispense with the soiled pragmatism and distancing irony which threatened to

interpose, and that as a result one could devote oneself to complete union with the world.

This activity, which seeks to remake the world in the world's image but its own medium, is of course writing (nothing to do with the real activity, although perhaps a sturdy boundary, to be reassured by in times of insecurity, ie, at my present stage, most of the time).

The trouble with this is that it posits writing as an opposition to life, when in fact this conception of writing arose out of dissatisfactions with life. It may be that, say, the ugly duckling at first thought that swans were just an embodiment of his dissatisfaction with the ways of ducks. But it may also be that turning him into a swan was the ducks' way of proving to the erstwhile duckling that he was one of them after all, and had a place, with duties, just like all other ducks.

Or, more likely, this particular duckling, quite undeluded about his own limitations, was nonetheless given the status of a swan (and actually *seen* as one by the more simple ducks) because this is the closest ducks in general can come to the conception of angels — a conception which the particular duckling not only entertained, but also disregarded as meaninglessly entangled with absolutes, that is, quite the opposite of his preoccupations.

Because he insists on charging the windmill of reality, the artist must be rendered supernatural by reality, lest *it* lose its comfortably natural appearance.

Being a coward, he sided with the eternal victor, disorder — only to find it not a side but an encompassing nothing with no ground to stand on. What choice did he have but to sprout wings?

A long, systematic yet anecdotal, rigid and yet rambling, cumulative yet pointless narrative which purports to be a study of an area of human experience in which the methodology has been determined by the contours of the subject. A detective story with uncircumscribed existence the crime; countless suspects, the writer the culprit.

... the relevance of these details will become apparent... in order to understand the difficulty of defining the crime, we must now turn to... the nature of our investigations makes it essential that the place of interview be the suspects' home, and that there be no indication that an interview is taking place... the friendships formed by the investigator with the suspects, which, in the interests of impartiality, must be disregarded, are the only possible domain of the evidence of crime, and could be said to constitute it... were he not investigating it, the narrator would be a participant in the crime... the duration of the crime is identical with that of the investigation... the punishment of the culprit is the termination of the investigation... whilst the investigation continues, crime of an altogether different and more serious nature is precluded...

This could be: — a solution to the main problem blocking my writing: lack of concentration — the application of alchemical properties to art (but at the same time a negation of art's alchemical action on selected aspects of life) — an aesthetic manifesto which turns form into content

This is: — the methodical incorporation of 'distractions'.

This has affinities with: — the Freudian (or Barthian) slip; here generalised to the whole field of the artist's experience — collage — Duchamp and Artaud — Formalism — 'the diary' — Genet

This has frightening implications of: — infinity — futility — aestheticism — schizophrenia (the void heart) — nil sales

but the advantages of: — avoiding positivism — being the truest realism — making vices virtues — uniting life and art — uniting fact and fiction

Its pure application is: — impossible, and yet...

As in autobiography, the gap between the experience and the recalling is almost more important than the 'subject' — in the gap occurs personalisation, selection, synthesis. The gap could last milliseconds, or decades.

'A book' would be expanded (or reduced) to 'a way of seeing'.

How specific, how naked, would you dare to be? Freud would have called Artaud an exhibitionist.

The text changes the writer's life — the writer's life changes the text.

It would be possible to *write the story* of such an enterprise; thus would the enterprise be passed off.

To revise would be forbidden.

The scope of the text would be confined to the text's effect on the writer's life: eg 'today, I think my mother noticed that I was a little excited after finishing the last chapter. She asked me about it: of course, I said nothing.'

Proust, Borges, Calvino..

Self-report, participant-observation. Sociology project.

The realisation of an ambition — introversion as an art form. Is this any different from extraverted authors, who project their object relations onto paper?

Perhaps it's a manifestation of the schizoid inside / outside oscillation (the Rum-Tum-Tigger paradigm), but it is so attractive that there could be an equivalent for the 'fiction' writer to the artist who takes his easel onto a street corner, the sociologist who does field-work, the business-man who dictates letters in a taxi, even the joiner who makes cupboards *in situ*. The ambition is to minimise the gap (ie alienation) between perception and reproduction. For a Sensation type this would just be a clerk's task; for an Intuitive it is the application of vision, the

feeding of a hungry and lonely subjectivity with the nourishment of immediate stimuli. When the Intuitive sets up his street stall, it is not a hypermarket but a delicatessen.

It would start as sketching and end as a search for The Central Place — and so probably lead back to the dreaded Writing Desk (via homes, cars & offices, schools, churches and governments).

Monday July 13th

By virtue of the fact that I am not so puritanical as to consider myself a writer, a whole writer, and nothing but a writer, I must exercise a modicum of selectivity — not to exclude the merely human experiences (this in itself would not ‘purify’ the writing as writing, just limit and dull it) but to leaven bland formalism with human *meaning* (ie the mental consequences of experience) which is *not* implicit in the codes & traditions already.

If only I could be a semi-literate primitive whose only utterance was spurred by the sharpness of his urge to express what is most important, and who didn’t have a comforting tradition, with mentors and assessors so ready to support the *means* of expression that they forget its *ends*, which might make him feel, however unconsciously, that there were criteria ready to be employed against him which were oblivious to expression, and even oblivious to humanity at its most basic (therefore real) level.

What I mean is: if only my voice and my thought / feeling were the same thing, that thing being a lucid and violent me, impossible to misunderstand. As it is, I have so many voices, none of them without its advocates and maligners, and so I can never drop the distance of *irony*, itself a ghastly, squawkingly bourgeois and schizoid voice.

A real driver sells his Mercedes and takes to the harshest motorbike he can find.

How it would sting the ‘literary world’ for someone to cry out outside their flabby conventions, and name the unnameable. (Beckett, Genet, perhaps Lawrence — but as quickly as possible such howling wolves are accommodated, given a place by the Dickensian fire, accorded respect as saviours of the very conventions they despised, and, with the best will in the world, misunderstood.)

But for this very reason you mustn’t envy the visual arts and music — they after all are so conducive to this direct expression that the critical bureaucracies have long since legislated for all surprise, accorded even the most anguished howling official status, and removed, with the uncertainty principle, all meaning from the more unexpected and direct forms of expression. Even artists have collaborated in this, using the previous generation’s most extremely-expressed emotional truths as a vehicle for their own complacency, mediocrity, love of convention.

Edinburgh as the Japanese and Czech travellers and compilers of travelogues saw it in past decades — this is a place to live, a place which beckons, but would actually be profoundly boring. Edinburgh as each long walk shows it to be — the impossible but real sum of minute and conflicting details — is a cacophony to be grateful for.

And I’m too ready to purify it. I should trust in the inevitable purification of seeing what I see and hearing what I hear.

O I don’t know

Not potentialities but actualities, not abilities but actions.

I am asked up to join Father and Douglas Ashmeade — to liven up their conversation. The best rapport (indeed, it seems like an inevitable opposition we force ourselves into) we achieve is dialectical, and this unfortunately leaves neither of us, as presented to the other, with much human reality left: we become dotted-line sophists, sclerotic even when we praise flexibility, disorder, and human virtues.

Earlier, Father had said of my haircut: 'I'm not having anyone with *my name* looking like that!' I didn't know what to say, wanted to avoid pointless conflict, so just compromised, saying it grew quickly. 'Not quickly enough,' Father said. I left. Later, when I wondered how I should've acted, I imagined simply going up to him and, quizzically, invoking the soft part of him (because he's so *bad* at being reactionary, it just looks ludicrous when he tries it). This depends on our being equals, and if my belief that equality means the freedom to be different, and that power and wealth are only important if both possessor *and* dispossessed consider them to be the primary factor of life — if this belief holds in real relationships, then it is possible to act as if equal —

But this is like Christian humility, accepting material poverty because, spiritually, one is the wealthier. Richness in one area is usually accompanied by poverty in others; superiority complexes are always precariously balanced on a single criterion. Pilate, arm of the imperial law, had to wash his hands of their judicial powers as soon as Christ's spirituality subverted the sway (recognised by makers *and* breakers of the law) of naked power, that is, superficial, external power.

I have no faith in rationality, I think in zigzag lines, I despise Socratic argument, yet all I do is throw off ideas. I'm stuck in the position of scatty thinker, when really I should step (almost) fully into the realm of emotional tones and intuitive tendencies; my element. But university, family, language itself are all wary of this, tend to take it for faulty rationalism, or something marginal and decorative. That's why it's easier to paint or compose music, where it's impossible to impose rational & functional use-values.

Perhaps all my semi-rationally elaborated revolutionary ideas could be implied in the simple abandonment of the use and exchange value which rational language indicates.

Hitherto I've only written a short story when I had a good psychological, political, etc point to put over. I've never enjoyed or practised writing for its own sake. I've been positivistic, anchored in rational discourse. I always changed my point by expressing it, though. It was sheer laziness which prevented me from

learning from this that the highest expression results when it appears one is simply manipulating the medium for its own sake. That this is not necessarily true (who *cares* what's 'true?') should not prevent me from trying to write without an imposed idea.

Oh, the bias I've got to overcome! Ah, an aim, 'the play of lure and resistance'!

How 'real' are ideas in a private notebook?

There was a very beautiful German girl on Princes Street. After craning my neck to catch a better glimpse of her, I crossed the street and passed an old tramp with the same type of face (bone structure, dimensions, features).

No conclusions are based on this evidence. Perhaps noting it is therefore the most worthwhile part in this whole entry. Perhaps that was my first true piece of writing. Now I've spoilt it by making the commentary longer than the text. Critic!

But I hereby promise to plunge into the mode of intuitive-descriptive / aimless expression. My element, at last!

Wednesday July 22nd

Our Organised Collision (Tentative Abstract of a Passionate Field-Trip)

Issuing from traffic to your door
I brought unwelcome home
The sense of a displacement —
The foreignness of toothpaste and of baths
Which alone your timetable's
Redeeming tender had forgiven;

So in me you met aloneness
And your room was switched
From self

To scatterings
In one move.

Then in between your shifts
I camped in sheets
On strict condition that my worrying mind
Should not slip its leash
And run amuck
Amongst your spindle-legged observations.

In public places we admired
Some worn familiar things
Preserved with residues of meaning:
Pots, ramshackle granite buildings
And an adolescence, hung up
Lit and happily unlaundered
On a screen.

But privately our dealings
Seemed suspended,
Miniature and in the dark:
A baby letter, never sent;
A postcard of a painting, subjectless,
Which dared a thousand
Sly interpretations,
Pulled a poker face and showed
Its front side bluff,
Its back a blank.

Other messages were drawn into the light
From within a large official-looking envelope.
One was mine
Another his:
Both unfolded when required,

Confiding
Melancholy ululations
(As trains on different gauges whistle,
Hosted for a moment in one station.)

Through a time
Construing equally as day and night
My hands reclaimed in shadows
Either burrowed out of sight
In pockets, intimating harm,
Or else, nocturnal, still atremble,
Rooting all around your person
Frictionless as moles
And as solitary.

There, in the smallness of the hour,
My well-intended compliment
Was wrapped, superfluous, in tissue.

And when the too-intense attentions of the day
Had watered thin with wan —
Then I became pedestrian
Within
A gentle, voice-depriving dream.

At last the traffic,
Tolerant
Of our brief flirtatious circulation,
Governed my volition once again.
Then sidling up, respectively, came
Our disorders, musing as they neared
To each of us in private, understanding tones.

Monday July 27th

No likelihood of the demon story — or any story, for that matter — materialising in time for the Arts Council anthology (closing date the end of this week). Instead I commit to tape a profusion of clattering songs, and entertain dreams of signing to a record company.

Driving the car I feel secure and dominant, as if the world were less real than me. But on my own two feet I can't refuse the slightest offering, and inner sights and sounds are dispensed with at the slightest distraction.

Spoke about psychoanalysis with Jessie Simm.

The difference between a schizoid's feeling of being marked off from others and an artist's is that the artist forces other people to agree that his self-image is 'valid'.

Seeing Hanna was hardly bearable, but being alone is no better. In both cases my gut gets the better of me, and I feel as if I've drunk several cups of black coffee. (I'm floating in black coffee, punctuated by tiny white saccharine tablets, and I've somehow mistaken it for space, and can even see the earth quite close, quite distinct from me...)

When you chase 'truth' you just up the scale of your lies, and utter them with the unconscious irony of pure naiveté. That's not to say such a chase, such purity, can't be quite beautiful. It's just not much to do with living.

Those who talk about 'life' do so to avoid talking about living.

No sooner have you scoffed yourself
Right off the idea of selling yourself
Than you find you're not only
Scattered all over the shop but
Also locked out and
Also penniless.

Perhaps sanity has its price.

Tuesday July 28th

A letter from Hanna, although dense with the usual quota of double binds, said enough nice things to make me decide to visit her again from Thursday to Monday.

She says: 'The truth is I love to spend sleepless nights with you and I wish I could. It all sounds so silly when I'm mean and don't like your unsociability etc. But it hurts when I think of you. That's why I'd like to forget you. At the same time I want you to care about me and know me like I'd like to know you but also I realise it couldn't work since from experience that side of me is forever too hopeful and sets its standards too high so that it just can't happen. Do you understand? I'm quite scared of my emotions — they can be so strong and real and then they go because I feel drained and ultimately not wanted enough. Whereas if I'm with someone who doesn't stir me up emotionally affection can develop without all the accompanying fears and desperation...'

The trouble is that she forces me from hyperaesthesia to anaesthesia so that I'm more receptive to her, but then finds none of her effort and affection returned. We seem incapable of being equals in anything but sex.

God, there's more to me than a catalogue of schizoid symptoms — if only the world didn't keep brushing it aside as if it were a threat to them. I'm a round peg skewiff in an insignificant square hole, and when I present myself to people they enquire politely about my corners.

A kinder enquiry came today when I was walking on Lothian Road. A boy in a business suit came out of the the ABC (where he'd been chatting with some teenage girls) and said to me 'Are you a wanker or something?' By the end of the block the questions has become more routine, and he even held out his hand to me and said 'My name's Gerry,' before reporting back to his girls.

At Orson Welles' 'The Trial' the guy sitting next to me must've yawned several hundred times. He began to sigh loudly, and when any vaguely sexual scene came on he stretched and looked round the cinema like someone who's been waiting hours for the film to start.

Psychiatry says that boredom is just repressed excitement — this man's boredom was a positively calisthenic strategy to vent his subconscious anxiety (which surfaced more immediately in sniggers which he immediately followed with elaborate yawns). Before the film began he'd been talking about union politics. No doubt the film's dream logic struck him as the antithesis of political reality. Actually, dreams show us the human results of politically wrought circumstances. The more rationalised the environment, the more dreams mock at rationality as a principle of human management. To ignore dreams is to grant politics absolute authority, and that is to dissolve humanity *and* politics.

The film's success lay in details only: the gigantic, regimental typing pool, the combination of baroque and modern architecture (with nothing between), Titorelli's room, the court balcony, the harpies. As a whole, succeeded much less well than Cherub's stage version.

Mark Smith's Fall lyrics — proletarian mythology, the familiar made strange from a van window. 'I have seen the madness in my area.'

Saturday August 29th

Festival — Daumier — Musical Career Begins.

Dream: Howard Devoto (HD) was at university with me (I also had a chimpanzee which was very sympathetic and lonely, wanted a mate, and I hardly served). On the first day he murdered me with four shotguns. Somehow I recovered. Our rivalry. His 'house' and playing fields — he was getting violent one day, so I escaped by the next-door playing-fields, smearing myself with lime-chalk. Arrived at the art school. HD also came — I tried to convince him to be an artist. He

didn't believe in it. We walked along the road (HD having killed someone at the art school). My plea that we work together in a group. Argument: that his violence is a kind of repressed creativity — that many 'nicer' people were really more violent — potentially. Me on stage, singing to a tape in university. HD having a bath with a chink in the door, approving. An irritated academic asks that the sound be put down. HD altercates. The academic is a girl. They go to a cafe table. She picks up a knife to make a point. HD also picks it up and, visibly tempted, lets it hover over her bosom before plunging it in. This time his crime can't be covered up — his latent creativity is lost to the world.

As I awoke I had the unpleasant feeling of being completely alone in the darkness, and breathing loudly.

I surprised you by the chimney
You were waiting for me with a distant look in your eyes
Nearby someone was singing: it sounded like 'let me out'
But we had two seats booked in my name.

When you stopped to adjust your hair
Two gulls skimmed the streetlights
Fighting for a fish
I let out an ugly laugh
And touched you in a secret place
But you pretended not to notice

Your face is a lid
You hide your face behind
Let me touch you!
But no, all you offer is your hide

There is a film on about your mother
Who you have always hated
But when the lights come up
And I point out the resemblance

You defend her
Then tell me I am often like her.

Your hands are two hermit crabs
In a cold embrace
Your nails are shells
That whiten at my touch.

Often I am eager to forgive these things
I caress you until it enters your mind
To comb my hair.
I submit, and sense how lovingly
You trace the contours of the human head
(Not necessarily mine).

Your love is weighed out
And awarded to the deserving
I accept it like
A foreign currency
Which I may, one day, exchange.

Tuesday November 17th

After a long lapse, I return to the ordering principle of these yellow covers — largely because making the break with university (three years in a place like Aberdeen is already a year too many) has landed me lock, stock and barrel in my own hands, lonely, but responsible.

In ten days The Happy Family will appear on two of the most important rock stages in Scotland, and I'll have to modulate my quivering voice to some kind of singing tone.

Just now I don't want to write about that — at least not directly. Its symbolic role in the indeterminate tragedy that these diaries have unfolded since '79 is that it

keeps a foot in a door through which much light — and the gazes of most of my peers — flows. There are still as many possibilities of communion as ever — even if that only means the actual state of my relations with people is as vague as before.

But really, this self-pitying and speculative crap is exactly what I stopped the diary to ditch. What needs to be written here is — well, no manifestos. Just praxis.

Mother loosed me from her arms
And set me on the bench
My seven sisters gave me clothes
To spare me from the pinch
And though I shed some frightened tears
And turned to them and pled
They cracked the whip and off I flew
On the trip from A to Z
On the life-sled

The snowstorms flurried in my face
And pine trees lashed my limbs
I tried to keep my spirits up
By singing chants and hymns
But lunacy had clutched my course
A demon stoked my head
And the words I sang were not my own
On the trip from A to Z
On the life-sled

O the eucalyptus in the air
The hissing in your ears
The hunchback who stole your memories
Has eaten your ideas
And so the million villagers

Who come to watch me pass
Elected me their idiot
And flayed me with their laughs

There was once, in the Edinburgh head office of a prestigious bank, a high-spirited and mischievous bank manager. To look at, he was certainly ordinary enough — slightly overweight, in dark blue pinstripes, silver-haired — and this was probably what had led his superiors to promote him so high in the echelons of the bank. His work had always been reliable and neat, with occasional flashes of brilliance: he had, no-one quite knew how, secured the business of the fantastically powerful Rauchenberg brokers; when asked about this he would shrug and say simply ‘Oh, Mr Rauchenberg was enchanted when my son made him the gift of a harmonica,’ and he would look around shiftily, as though he had just confessed to bribery.

In fact, the only clue to Mr B Green’s true nature was in his eyes, which were distorted safely behind thick wire-rimmed glasses which made him look like Franz Schubert — magnified many times, his watery blue eyes flicked this way and that like playful tropical fish in a tank.

Like many of his colleagues, Mr B Green made jokes to amuse his secretaries. But Mr Green was not only more interested in his own jokes, he also reduced his secretaries to helpless laughter, something his colleagues were hard put to understand. He had, for instance, a receptionist called Sally.

‘Let us sally forth into the day,’ said Mr B Green, the mischievous bank manager, as he passed his secretary Sally one Wednesday afternoon.

For a man known to have arrived at work in an electric wheelchair, apparently without legs, this was a sober greeting, worthy of any number of high-ranking, even-tempered bank officials. Sally hardly smiled — it augured poorly for the day ahead.

Mr B Green had, in fact, been unnaturally subdued for some days. His darting blue eyes, usually flashing behind his thick glasses like tropical fish in a tank, seemed now immobile, encased in the glass like museum exhibits.

Wednesday December 16th

It’s an unpleasant sign of human perversity that whenever there is more time available than means to fill it, action of any kind is progressively abandoned. The indifference one meets in everything when one is alone and without a guiding purpose has the kind of power headlights cast on small night creatures.

If David hadn’t beaten Goliath, he might have succumbed to the weather.

And while I cower from the snow and wind, waiting for someone to call, or for the next idea for something to do, I’d like to be able to slip words into these pages, like the tiny surplus the housewife hides in a jar, saving towards some small fantasy.

The only time I come alive these days is at Happy Family rehearsals. Mark testifies to this, and is so impressed by the transformation from red-eyed sponge to vital musician that he wants to take pictures. Showing the others parts (domination) or singing behind the mic (participation) I am elated.

Russian icons; Montale’s poetry and Auden’s; Kafka biography; Grimm’s tales; Brecht / Weill; Berlin theatre songs; my reference points just now.

Substitutes, of course, for warm weather and friendship, but if life were even half adequate for the living, what use would art be?

What I really need before I can give myself a plan is to have an unrestricted view — the view only the dead could command — of every details of someone’s life. It probably wouldn’t much matter whose — even my own might do, given the right viewpoint. And if I discovered depths and heights beyond the conception of my lazy but searching ken, only then would I take myself in hand, convinced that I

was missing more than the superficial ability to evoke the envy of others. But the rub is that it is precisely because I insist on fitting plans — systems of justification — to the stream of indifference that constitutes my life, that I miss the spontaneous pull of the very heights and depths that I so half-heartedly crave.

Very old bells are tolling here, almost drowned out by the pompous flourishing of *belles lettres*.

1982

Wednesday February 17th

The weather is bad, your only public is a virus, you have none of the compensation of the employed — salary, associates, the end of the day — you dream about religious conversion but cannot afford a ticket to Dalkeith, let alone Damascus. You lust for sunshine and eternity — the two are more closely connected than most Northerners are willing to own — because you live in a state like a locker-room, its fixtures relevant to the lower functions of the body and those traits of mind which superficially resemble childhood but in fact spring directly from dependence.

Have you ever seen a convincing case of love here? One or two in the course of a lifetime, always at such a distance from yourself that it could have been a mirage caused by your own longing.

You write to save your life, you write to make a space to sit in, somewhere other than the room you sit in, some other dimension, for your disease is simply this: that you have realised, through lack of distraction, where and what you are, and these facts are for once relevant because, for once, they are all. What you are is a growing fear that, without distracting illusions, little chemical rewards like

alcohol and what passes here for friendship, there is nothing nourishing and supportive in this life, only the space one makes, in the course of bland years, to protect oneself from the countless corrosives.

But don't allow yourself to write the laws that would justify your punishment.

What has brought me to this (apart from perfectly natural disappointment at inactivity brought about by Ian's illness [drummer Ian Stoddart was suffering from Hodgkin's Disease] is inertia. I am inert because when I move into the world I find only stupidity. Here, the stillness at least suggests thought. I find stupidity in the world because I am not strong enough to invoke other people's intelligence / love. I pretend I'm not a participant because if I were to *attend*, the bridging of the gap would require energy which no holy father, lover, or sin has given me.

Thursday February 18th

I'm living off my head, the song I pipe into it, Earl Grey tea, and damp architecture. The only thing that keeps me good is the yearning — it has a religious consistency and strength — for seriousness; not just the kind of seriousness one could cultivate like a garden, by studying geometry, say, but a concern with every face on a street, a desire to have access to every office, at the window of which one watches an employee gazing wistfully into the street. A willow tree can become an icon in the chapel of this seriousness, although in fact everything living is a candidate and nothing can ever be refused.

This seriousness is vulnerable, since it is, for all its distance from its subject, open. But it cannot so submerge itself in vulnerability that it enters life. Life is absolute vulnerability, and makes strengths and weaknesses merely relative to each other. To set out in the morning prepared to change and be changed by the day is to become, in this way, Herculean...

This becomes geometry — always this tendency has stood between my writing and poetry: the need to name an ineffable truth, which actually only means vagueness and knots.

Even on your own you play a part, even when you could in fact do anything you choose, you invent a nay-saying fate, personally responsible for you alone, which you then curse for robbing you of your life's chances. It's like making a graven image so that you can believe yourself damned by a real god rather than alone with your options.

If chromosomes could be matched like dominoes, and genetic selection was like choosing wallpaper, who would dare to have children?

Sunday February 28th

Last week I caught the 5 o'clock train to Glasgow and saw Genet's 'The Balcony' at the Citizens'. The play's idea — that everything we do or make is an act or artifice — struck me forcefully. The city seemed deeply theatrical after the play — I say deeply because it wasn't like Edinburgh's shallow sense of theatre, its vulgar jewellery of monuments and lighting effects, but rather a philosophical treatise on the nature of man which, like Marx's, has as its real goal not description but influence, so that it becomes a self-realising prophecy.

The two main points of the philosophy that is Glasgow are garrulity and social Darwinism: a chattering cut and thrust.

When I arrived the city was inexplicably full of starlings, on every tree and chimney, conversing excitedly. As I walked through the Gorbals I passed boys and girls on skateboards, slicing across a broad, dusky road amongst the wasteground and towerblocks, teasing the big cars that honked at them: tough and together, taking on the Rover 35s at the age of 10. Just beyond the theatre a mosque was being built — a strange piece of modern, rich Islam under the Gorbals moon, speaking not of Allah but of the effect of oil dollars on cultural genes. Across the Clyde a fierce Alsatian behind bars roared at me as I passed — a

dog brought from abroad, trained to turn its love for men into hate for the unauthorised, to spark the gut's flight message with its bark. A nearby cat let its nerves move it across a car park, and certainly wasn't going to solicit any favours from me, as a Morningside cat might.

Yet the extraordinary metamorphosis of the Gorbals — the transformation of a spirited community to a supermarket stack of labour — shows how easily these 'immutable' features of a landscape and a philosophy can change. People can be deprived of every 'innate' defence as easily as a dog can be taught to bark (at least until they develop new ones). It's not just a question of money changing buildings and minds — after all, you can put down a plush, warm theatre in the middle of the stark, disreputable Gorbals, then put on plays by a thief and charge the old and unemployed nothing to get in, and still the performance is patronised by people from the other end of town (or Edinburgh! — worse); well-groomed gays, respectable young marrieds, biology students.

Ah, the pupil amidst the white wastes of eye! In multi-coloured, single-functioned JJs I sit and make my one concession to social Darwinism: I measure lived differences and live contentedly when the unwound tape is long.

Troyat's biography of Tolstoy absorbs me more even than Hayman's of Kafka — well, at least as much. T's greatest merit was his capacity to vacillate over such great distances, physically, emotionally and spiritually, and always with the complete conviction and dedication only naiveté gives (or at least lack of self-irony), that he and life became indistinguishable: he *was* every character he wrote about, and particularly the most contradictory ones. This truly religious man knew more than any Christian about loving one's enemy.

I envy him the violence of his relationship with Turgenev (how ironic that these best friends / greatest enemies now sit side by side in the black-spined equanimity of Penguin Classics!) but I doubt that this power of engagement — take to these extremes, anyway — could do me much good: Tolstoy is temperamentally a great moor landscape channelled with the streams of his ideas, open to the devastation and nurture of the elements, whereas I am closed

in like a well with sky at the top and water at the bottom, my ideas, really only a single idea, a bucket drawing up the same still foetid water, to be blessed by the reflection of the sky's flux.

A story's bones: how people choose to be agents or victims.

It was Ron Butlin, whom I stumbled across when I was looking for lectures to gatecrash at the David Hume tower, who recommended the Tolstoy biography — a nicely tangy, tangible was of recommending the whole business of writing in preference to stringing together pop songs. Ron himself was in a group, in the London of 1968 — 'we were terrible,' he says, from his unsettlingly low chair in his unsettlingly grey, high room (the mist all over Salisbury Crags and the lion's haunches, the South Side a chimney you could throw a pebble down, me berating the scary highness of university's view of the world). Ron looked like one of the young men with grey hair Father fishes with; swingers from design partnerships who have discovered that middle age has designs on them and have thought about becoming dignified gentry, but remained boys (not despite but because of their aspirations). Ron was happiest when I asked him to list his publications — slim but, to Ron, ample. Did Ron write novels? He'd tried, but hadn't persisted. Did Ron plan his stories? No, he'd be no good at it, and it made writing a chore for both writer and reader. Was Ron too complacent, I wondered afterwards, was he just nibbling a leaf on the tree of life? Did he send me away to get acquainted with Tolstoy because he knew that he himself was an insufficient advertisement for literature, and that I was someone in need of some small or great dose of persuasion? At any rate, he offered to read anything I might write, and maybe I'll take up the offer: Tolstoy is otherwise engaged (just now, amongst Jews on the Warsaw-Moscow train).

Marriage: Tolstoy's quest for it (almost as an abstract virtue rather than a living arrangement); Kafka's idealisation of it; the uncertain approach of Malcolm and Syuzen's wedding; the collapse of the marriage that started me . . . and I think 'I am of marriageable age and yet the word sounds like a joke, a fairy tale, a threat. But then I read a moving account (in Father's 'Hite Report on Male Sexuality') of a Jewish academic's relationship with his academic wife (oral sex, conversation,

sunshine, daughters) and think 'Is this numbness, this voluntary hiding I call a life, a sentence of incompleteness?' Being in *The Happy Family* seems the closest I'll ever come to saying, as Thomas J Newton does in 'The Man Who Fell to Earth', 'I'm a family man myself.' But if it were ever to happen, say with an office or teaching job thrown in for means, the delightful sense of fraudulence, of being an actor, that I envisage! Letting people find me out in instalments! But in fact I would be fooling myself as much as them, because the role would annexe me as quickly as I appeared, like weeds in a back yard, through it: 'These are not weeds, they are a bouquet for family and state!'

Monday March 1st

At the university German department I am polite to the point of anonymity with the secretary — she elaborates on lecture schedules and I register my attentino when in fact I am taking in only the yellow and blue of Leith docks, the set beyond the crumpled red crags. A professor, rotund as a depressive, enters — he's like Mr Ronberg, jovial in an almost tragic, Saxon way. He says to the peat-coloured twee secretary: 'It's lucky that boy is here, otherwise I'd want to kiss you for that!' (some information she's found). He smiles at me, drawing me out of my ghostship, my clientship, so that my parting 'Thank you very much' sounds like the rustle of a dry compliment slip.

Downstairs with Seferis' 'Days of 1945-1951' as shell, I sit in the student refectory. The wind and sun, excited by the sheer quantity of architecture, billow the great window into the small of my back. The students, happy and (thus) unobservant, pay me no mind, and soon I can close my book and sit watching them like a 360 degree film screen.

Tolstoy in London, says Troyat, found 'not one curious glance in the street, not one over-hasty movement, not a cry, not a smile. Nothing but measured, sober citizens hiding their souls and going about their business with no concern for that of others.' Typical displacement that these crustaceans should call eye contact 'nosiness'. Edinburgh is staffed with citizens like this. Today I stopped on Princes Street to watch a paraplegic (I think) — a man in his thirties, alone in a

denim suit, make his way amongst the shoppers in a series of miraculous and balletic spasms, no one step like another, sometimes stationary, then lurching surprisingly quickly past another pane. Nobody gave him a second glance, but everyone was acutely aware of him. To see him move — nothing like the stock repertoire of the drunk — in this unbelievable way was *extraordinary*, it jarred so much against the conventions of normal conduct that it called every single passerby into question — far from making the man look absurd, it made everyone else look a fool. All these citizens determined to do and see only what they understood, and for this reason understanding nothing.

What I said yesterday about sitting in JJs: there's really nothing to be gained from feeling untouched by something, even if its touching hand has the swing of a mechanical fist. Well, there is something; the critical eye. But this is a fishy and limited instrument. Try to understand why someone has pink hair without experiencing the flirtation between two planes of reality which a simple exchange with her sets off — it's useless. In fact her pink hair may be doing actively what your fishy critical eye soaks in like smelly old vinegar: breaking social sets, doing paraplegic ballet in the march of the citizenry, building mosques in uniform Pasteurised slums.

Do you live and learn, or does every little insight require a pinch from death?

Tuesday March 2nd

After some tension at the Foundation caused by the theft of some video recorders and my badly-timed request to use one to tape 'Baal', Father starts offering me food in his flat and then, having framed me with this surplus, accuses me of being useless and dependent, a 22 year-old child. I should get a job, she says, although I've told him that next week I'm going down to London to play the ICA. As I nibble at poppadoms and smile ironically, he suggests enterprising schemes: write film reviews for the paper, wash dishes, anything. He's afraid that his 'soft-heartedness' in giving me a room 'which I could otherwise use for my fishing tackle' will prevent me from suffering in the educative way I should. These arguments seem to me to have a fanatical and moral slant to them, and my smile

springs from the fact that I consider someone who has crystallised all his perplexity at 'society' in a faith in its supposed abstract expression — money — can't possibly understand my need to detail all the nameless currencies of social and personal relations, one step removed (but this is the critical eye rearing its ugly ball again). You can't possibly take advice from somebody whose thought is so monumentally abstract (no, it's not the pot calling the kettle black, my abstractions, as these notebooks show, come directly from what I see and hear on my travels). Strip away all this talk of 'suffering' and 'reality' and how do we compare? Father lords it daily at the Foundation, with his harem of secretaries and his staff of pedagogues who 'suffer' by speaking their mother tongue in front of groups of attentive foreigners. Plugged into an international network of businessmen-teachers like himself, he experiences a reality purified of all but professional considerations. His colleagues and workmates reinforce his most important beliefs about himself and the world, and business and fishing trips show him the current of highways, railways and rivers, observing the usual codes of traffic and fish. What possible reason has he (aside from some need to reclaim the quivering territory of his perplexity, in the interests of manliness) to be curious about the world?

Curiosity is the greatest enemy of the orthodox currencies (being itself a sub-currency), and the cornerstone of creativity. But it can only flourish in open conditions, without overpowering fear. And the hard-edged real world bases its green currency only on that part of people's relations characterised by fear and closedness to curiosity.

Which isn't to say that, in such a world, creativity hasn't adapted itself so that it is motivated by the unmanageable qualities of fear inspired in weak creatures like me. We get stuck on as an afterthought, like the valve on the simmering pot-lid, to blow off steam occasionally.

Earlier in the day, when we were on better terms (because there was a hefty rank difference between us — it was in his office at the Foundation) we spoke about Seferis: 'I met him once,' said Father, though it turned out that he had just been at a lecture, 'Homage to Seferis', into which the dying poet had inconspicuously

slipped. At the end of his life, S had been *persona non grata* with the Colonels, and consequently with the British Council and Embassy as well. 'Was that because of his political role or because of his poetry?' I asked (separating the two for Father's sake — I never have the courage to put forward my ideas before him unless challenged in an argument). 'Because of his Songs For Greece — very inflammatory,' said Father, thereby admitting the reality of symbolic currencies which, later, he wasn't willing to concede to The Happy Family.

But even if he allowed this, the ball would still be in his court. Poetry isn't just a zigzag, sophisticated form of teaching or propaganda, it's something you brew up in the samovar of your frightened, curious body without wondering whether it will become the new Coca-Cola. You do it because that's what the chambers of your heart seem best tooled up for.

Thursday March 4th

A travel agent who finds a foreign place in a woman.

A poet who arrives, incognito, at the hall where his reputation is being held.

An ambitious journalist who snatches a sensational obituary from the jaws of his rival then prevents its subject being snatched from the jaws of *his*.

'An ambitious man is a strange creature. He may seem to be putting all his strength into his work, usually the most anonymous and public-minded occupation, when all the time he is really building a great statue to himself, and living only for the day of its unveiling. On this day he will no longer have to go to work: his name will go for him. His name and a semblance of his features will be available daily, behind a desk, to carry on the essential maintenance that the statue requires, while he himself, uncorroded by public scrutiny, is free to walk the city's parks.

'Perhaps it's stranger still when one man's ambition depends entirely on his supposedly selfless work, assessing and enhancing the completion of other ambitious men. This, more or less, is my position as a compiler of obituaries.'

Stories based on clever ideas get dull as soon as you have to start following the line you've projected. Better to avoid such projection as far as possible — even though my sense of form demands a wide-narrow-wide structure: the old school history essay shape.

The going gets mechanical when the ideas which inspire the story have to attach themselves to a character, who either has no life, or becomes more significant than the threads he's supposed to pull through the plot's maze. Why do I always use only that part of myself which I feel I've outgrown, feel superior to, in stories? Meanness with the few parts of myself I like? Desire to prevent readers — and myself — identifying (A-effect)? Concern with ideas (ie my immediate proof of existence, according to Descartes — actually a proof of loneliness, since for most, garrulous people 'I please / displease therefore I am' would fit better) rather than personalities (ie outward observation of people, or observation of people's observations of oneself)?

Never forget the sheer sensuality of writing, and how effortless expression of this aspect of things can be; the coincidence of a pleasing phrase with an aromatic impression. Stick to the mass of things, and ideas will flow like air around and between them.

At the university, a reading of 'A Winter's Tale'. With a headache instead of a text to follow, I let much of the play bounce off the walls of the George Square theatre senselessly. But what registered distinctly were the characters of the readers. Uncostumed, they probably acted more intensely, as if to exorcise their own clothes and handheld texts. One by one they sprang to life out of the semicircle of chairs, and became themselves by reading these archaic, vital lines. A red-haired boy with transparent NHS glasses; with the frame of a 12 year-old he was nonetheless whispered to by the older readers on either side. The lecturer, tall in modest leisure browns, discovering his own madness in the role of King,

abandoning all open-minded liberal sensitivities in his printed rage against his adulterous wife.

And while this was going on, people were passing and detracting from each other on the windy streets simply because they had no such parts to step into.

Our century made the common man the measure of all things by making all things unmysterious to a (hypothetical) empty common man. Every new product, including next year's democracy, creates its own market.

How important to keep putting the simple, obvious truths into symbols: keep truth seductive, keep showing up lies as plaster-cast strumpets.

Who enters the courtyards of seminaries hoping to reach the garden of Eden? I'm still on the wrong side of the tracks: sensual only in principle, and only practise reaches the perfect, it walks backward into it, with a divine suspicion rather than calculated certainty.

'Ah, my boy, it's precisely people like you that the seminary needs — and have you ever had evidence that anyone can *live* across the tracks?'

Saturday March 6th

With Keith & Keith, RSA student competition opening. Keith Grant gets drunk and serious, speaks about taking art into the community, performance, and other subjects that interest me: it's just his challenging way of expressing himself that prevents me talking — if I don't disagree I can't contribute here, K would take any qualified agreement as either refutation of his belief or a completely unnecessary bolster to his ego (this in the Cafe Royal, with all sorts of complicating circumstances: my lateness, the fact that I was reading a letter from Hanna rather than talking, the tendency of three to oscillate between bicker and boister, unable to become *soulful* as two can.) At Deacon Brodie's, a good community feeling amongst art students. In came Paula with a man, we waved and stared at each other quite tenderly — she strong and womanly, something

Eskimo about the structure of her face; brows, teeth, an aura of things irrational and serious, a darkness around her. What is my anima doing trolloping about town with other men?

We make a tour of the art college, pagan in its occupation, full of slogans, a precariousness between the pillars. A huddle of students watch a video of cubicle fellatio in the darkened common-room. On a studio noticeboard, amongst cuttings from Bakunin, the maxim: 'Prefix every different kind of painting with the word "curiosity".'

Ian holds a television party: Syuzen and Davy don't come, so it's just two Gillians, two Keiths, a different Susan, Ian and me before the screen. I protest, but the taped flow goes on: Laurel and Hardy, Humphrey Bogart, Top of the Pops, Whistlestest, Riverside... coming between us just like the music in pubs, walls in houses, fear of coming irreversibly close. Gillian (Ian's Gillian) talked to me about child psychology in Florida, then turned, curled on the sofa, to please me with her profile.

When, outside, I regretted not having the space to talk, Keith said 'What is there to talk about?' But it's only when you run out of 'things to talk about' that you get to the brink of the interesting, to yourself. In talking cultures this is done charmingly and without squeamishness. In a television culture it's linked with drunkenness and regret.

Monday March 15th

Somebody can wait in vain for an opportunity for the telling of some piece of his life's history, simply because the right conditions for the right question never arise. (Davy on the bus today telling me, as we passed a graveyard, how he'd written a story at school about seeing his own name on a gravestone, and being run over by a car — before he'd read 'Joseph K was dreaming...')

We visited Paul Haig, who leaves for cult status in Brussels tomorrow. He looked like a secondary school science pupil, with ridiculously parted off-white hair,

tobacco-coloured eyebrows, wooden features, not the same Paul Haig who used to sit in the Royal Mile Cafe pretending to be Kafka. He demonstrated his drum machine, mixing desk, keyboards; awkward at any more human level, like Father in this. The oblong, paneless window of his bedroom looks out on ploughed fields and pylons, chafed by wailing wind and over-rich yellow sunshine. I mistake the gale for an owl. At one moment, despite my aura of confidence and brotherliness with this star and hero of mine, I tremble visibly as I take a gulp of the coffee he has brought us on a neat tray: cups, jug, plate of assorted biscuits. Everything fanatically orderly; his records in strict alphabetical order, warehouse-modern sofa, hi-fi and instruments on stands; and he drops gentle hints which ask us to leave.

I learn German from Der Spiegel.

Conversations with Granny & Mother (separately) about the family. G says she always saw us as unnaturally detached.

Sunday March 28th

Single about to be released — for me it's already quite inadequate; weak, unironic, po-faced. The next one will be stories and passion and flirtatiously disconcerting.

Resolution: embargo critical studies ('The Creative Vision', 'Art Students Observed', 'The Social Construction of Reality'... useful procrastinations of the things they prepare for) and stick to short novels ('The Immoralist', 'The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick'). Then make your way into writing, trying to be as banal, comic and naive as it takes to ingrain the habit.

Students at the Midville art college undergo a merciless assault throughout their four years — the tutors neither tell them what is required of them nor spare them, in the absence of positive examples to follow, scorn at the inadequacy of their current work. The students live in a state of permanent confusion and anomie, and learn to do work which is meaningful to themselves (and not tutors,

parents, other students) instead. While it seems that their selves are being broken down, they are in fact being built up. The aim of the art college is to be rougher on budding artists than 'real life' — and yet to have — or appear to have — no dogma to instil, no economic and social mission (as real life has) except the arrangement of the building itself, ie studios instead of firms.

If one were to take the Cruel Frederick character from 'Strewelpeter', expand him without shading or broadening his character, and give him a banal (and thus) compelling career title — Commissioner for Urban Renewal — people could be made to accept him as a valid figure, and, ignoring or even protecting his archaic origins, accommodate him into the pantheon of government by commonsense.

Hadley, a journalist, drops the name of Renewal Officer Fredericks in a report on slum clearance. He does this to provide balance for the views of Smith, a planner whose liberal views are unacceptable to the paper. Fredericks doesn't exist. Smith writes to reject Fredericks' argument. In his large, bay-windowed study, Hadley composes Fredericks' reply. Acquaintances in Hadley's smart local pub join the debate, back Fredericks. It is intimated that Conservative McBain, old and meek, backs Fredericks. Revelation: McBain is to retire, on doctor's orders, from his constituency (he's MP for Hadley's area). He asks Hadley's paper if Fredericks would consider standing. Hadley is homosexual — Fredericks is played from this point on by an old lover, Finn (for whom Hadley has nothing but contempt — because Finn will do whatever Hadley wants, and keeps pestering him. Hadley backs Finn from the newspaper's columns. F meanwhile has grown 20 years younger — he is smart and confident. H & F become lovers once more. On the even of the election, a quarrel — F has schemes which even H finds reactionary. H, in rage and jealousy, writes an exposé of F. The paper rejects it and H is sacked. F, of course, wins the election. H tries to assassinate him, but is arrested.

Thursday April 1st

This little plot wrapped itself around my clutch of songs and has become 'the concept' which we are now pinning all our commercial hopes on.

I however can't muster any excitement about it, because the medium, the business of pop, seems to be a great consuming mouth which can swallow any number of potentially wise ideas as a dog might snap up some rare food, just to keep it alive, to service its feckless habits.

Things move faster, more noisily, with an increasingly moral shrill, in order to stay in the same place.

Headline in today's Times: 'Standard of living falls as company profits rise'.

Back to pop music: I feel so much above its habits, not ambitious except on my own meaninglessly un-musical terms, that I end up unaccredited by the musical arbiters, and my self-esteem, the lowness of which brought me to music, drops another couple of points. (Melody Maker review.)

Walking around with Paul & Davy, great cumbersome distances with boxes of singles, repaired guitars, in search of mixing desks and drummers. We break this spiritless quest for spells in cafes. I find myself concentrating on somewhere else, Auden's biography for instance, and so the present, to which everyone is sentenced (and the present has no respect for either past achievement or potential; it challenges and ridicules everyone because it is absolutely, cruelly, indifferent) — this present presses in on me even more closely, even more indifferently, in the form of the traffic on a nonentity street, muslin curtains and jellyfish lampshades of brown plastic, flies, a proprietor who sizes you up and decides it's not worth becoming colourful for your benefit — these things are oppressive because your day is devoted not to a close study of them and their uniqueness, but to some eternally tantalising, vanishing future success, a bright yellow chair with your name on it which bobs on your own personal horizon until it makes you seasick.

It pains me to be part of a concern which stays buried in its own inadequacies, and takes advantage of the state of 'having nothing better to do' by seeking to realise some future exemption from its own resources.

It would pain me more to work in a business which required no radical development of my own inner resources — the kind of place where someone's rare compliment 'you're in good form today' would refer only to surface chirpiness or a momentary harmony of the humdrum in oneself (the soul's medicine for its own self-hate) with the humdrum of an organisation in profitable, busy stasis.

To choose to start from a position of having to justify one's whole existence in the world is to choose to remain there, because no-one who lacks this most basic self-confidence (thoughtlessness?) can gain it by winning, say, the world's praise, which is often the defensive accommodation of a foreign body. This isn't to say that such self-doubt can't produce greater personal effectiveness than the most unassailable confidence.

Do you believe in progress?

I believe that, like the retina, individuals and groups have to move to keep the same old picture intact (the link in any relationship must be an active, not a passive one). But what matters is the play of estrangement and recognition, not the direction of the estrangement itself.

Can human nature become estranged from itself?

I think it can, not necessarily always for the worse (the return journey is a joy), but the only proof is intuitive.

Can one call oneself an exile from a place one has never been?

Yes, in secret, and out loud only when the homecoming makes it a lie.

Can the arrogant perfume bottles of abstraction ever become descriptive paint pots?

With great success, if one has no fear of the lichens and clays which must first stain them.

Writing is undoubtedly a healing process. More so than reading because even a favourite author won't tell you what you want and when — this is something miraculous which only opening I Chings and Bibles at random can produce.

I'd like to be virtuous, to rise at 6.30 in the morning, have a valuable and wise wife, perhaps teach young children, write in the afternoon and evening, visit the third world in the company of humanists (missionary ethnologists?) and have no radio. I'd like to be an adult.

Ah, Steiner, how you keep pulling at me from that ridiculous spiritual plane: otherness has strings on my every limb.

At Sidestreet Music, three balding bearded men in their thirties, with bad tempers and black leather jackets, argued about contracts and busy schedules. Davy talked to the man behind the counter about hiring mixing desks. The assistant suggested, amicably, that for the price they would charge (if they had one in stock) it would be as well to use a studio. Davy pointed out that for £20 one would only get two hours in a studio, whereas the mixing desk could be used all day. The assistant mentioned microphones as an additional expense. Outside, as we crossed a park leading to a bridge over the Union Canal, Davy reported this conversation to Paul, who had been in a different part of the shop, as if the assistant had been deliberately unhelpful — 'We wouldn't hire *you* a desk even if we had one', he was reported as saying. Davy then mentioned a musician who was given many perks in the same shop. Paul accepted this confrontational version of events, encouraging Davy by saying things like 'He'd just be back up his pals in the studios'.

I just grinned. The scene was obviously being presented in primary colours so that it could be spoken about with more passion, so that it could earth the host of minor snubs Davy might have felt himself prey to throughout the day.

Some boys passed me on the street, all three with the same squared-off haircut.

Friday April 9th

I looked at the familiar strange name 'Elgydium' on my toothbrush and longed for exile.

Tuesday April 20th

I told the others I'd write to 4AD today proposing a series of four singles, episodes rather, adding up to the story sequence 'The Man on Your Street'. Having to clarify the narrative, the tenuous links between the songs, disciplined me and I began to see new connections. Geneva as Calvin's stamping ground, connection with 'Puritans'; Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, the symbol of military endeavour, the passage from the cerebral north to the sensual south (Turin); the idea of making the lovers the long-lost children of Mary Law, first by Law, then Hall... the incestuous / Oedipal resonance didn't give me more than a quick smirk until I came up against it relating the thing to Mother, and quickly edited it. The point is, as soon as I saw the thing as it must seem to outsiders (apart from a superficial novelty value) I saw only eccentricity and a playfulness born of anomie, of lack of compassion for any of the characters ('just words in songs,' as the epilogue puts it). I saw a glut of apparatus and a heat consisting of residue dating from the writing of the songs.

Some of this revulsion sprang from my realisation that the episode / single scheme, if carried out as we decided, at two-monthly installments, would occupy us until December. Winter again! Do I want to chain myself to this half-baked story, with all its political pretentiousness and personal cynicism, its schizoid imagery of doubles and borders and enemies, mostly homage to Magazine songs, for the rest of the year? No. Rather than stepping back from these parts of myself in order to make puppet-shows with them, I'd rather enact them in person; myself across the border from pain to love and back — I reserve the right to wavering, to dialectic, to dissatisfaction and reaction. A plan is something for the middle-aged who want a monument for posterity, it is what Klee's sick man

makes only because he is sick. Being young is about using the tension that structurelessness, purposelessness engender to light up precarious yearnings, passions of the moment. Howard Devoto's museum songs, his yearning after immortality; like Paul Haig's references to monuments and eternity, are the schizoid's kickings in desert sand, wishing it were still monumental rock, after he has left the oasis, the fertile ground.

Fertility *is* across the border. But if, on this side, we voyeurs could build a wooden horse, its shape based on our observation of the alien oasis tastes and also on our own subdued opposite — in other words, use all this paraphernalia we're encumbered with, balls, chains, locks, to stretch, like knotted sheets, the length from our barred window to the freedom of the street... well, in all the tangle of imagery I think the intention is clear enough.

Musically, I'm thinking of the Scritti Politti single 'Faithless' as I write this. Also perhaps Orange Juice, although when I listen to their records I realise that their importance ends in the symbolism of warmth: they're actually incoherent and parochial. There's something ridiculous but also reassuring about conversion to someone else's medium — the convert, because he does not see its arbitrariness and human mutability, finds something immortal about, say, deep soul music, he introduces only the best part of his figure into this ground, whereas in the music he himself invents he makes privacy and transparency opaque to the listener in a despairing sense of personal confinement to personal vision.

To be more specific, I want to sing a song which is looser, more spontaneous than those I've written, with a great outpouring of feeling, without artifice or irony. Strictly speaking, it's not a song which *could* be written, although arrangements could be made which might ease its coming. I feel that I haven't yet really sung, I've just mouthed the clever words, taken care to keep in tune, hope to be audible but secretly despaired of being listened to. The hostile ears of disturbed sub-basement neighbours, perplexed cleaners, and auditioning drummers have been my only audience.

In a sense I want a discipline which will be a lack of closure to the possibilities of the moment, a craft or proficiency which will be able to assimilate, therefore accept, all sorts of difficult propositions (like emotions). Call this a looseness, a sexual technique applied to song; it is really a sensitivity to the medium, an increased respect for its traditional expressiveness, and thus a desire to stretch it where it hasn't been stretched.

This discipline is the opposite of my 'concept' for 'The Man on Your Street'.

Friday April 23rd

This morning my separation and my drift reached the point at which I was galvanised into agency — writing. I cleared a space on my desk, sat down at 9 and wrote — total improvisation — until 12. Story about an art student couple, turned into ex-language students at a German resort; failing to communicate, they 'resort' to sex — or they would have, if I'd written on. But I went out to fill my belly at Frazer's cafe, then traipsed up to the university (terrified in case I met John Thomson), where the library rejected my application to use it, and where I leafed through ArtForum (the new expressionism takes purchase) before visiting the college Thin's for some short stories. Then, home with some symbolic folders. I started another story about a comedian, Whemm, who ends his career with the joke to end all jokes.

I don't know whether the fact that I lost interest in these stories before finishing them (as soon as the end came in sight — something I do with books too; the moment convergence sets in; songs also lose their appeal when they solidify into an authorised version) is provisional on my finding a good enough plot (inseparable from a good feeling about details, proportion of direct events to comment and narrative, and my own curiosity about the situation as it unfolds) or whether it's something characteristic, a failing that'll have to be overcome. But I regarded these as tentative exercises, a limbering up (after all, I haven't written prose since 'Lalune'!) for a habitual production which is sure to throw out increasingly adventurous and confident themes and treatments. When I'm satisfied with something finished, I'll market it, something I never did before.

This time it's going to be disciplined and professional. I don't know what really prevented this before; over-intellectualisation, I suspect, combined with a level of self-respect lower than I thought.

As soon as you start writing, you start collecting things for writing (which is different from collecting things for a diary which is, supposedly, for writing): the palms of a lecturer spread out behind him against the window of a classroom in DH tower, for instance. Often a little vignette like this can be the writer's reason for starting a piece which, on completion, might appear to have been motivated by some philosophical observation on human nature.

An appalling, timorous evening with Davy and Paul and Carolyn. We play pinball until we run out of money, then, with nothing to say to each other, stare at the machine as if it will continue to entertain us. Failing this, we drive to Davy's flat to let TV do this. Every time I say something I am disgusted at how banal, humourless — in fact, wounded and animal-like — it sounds, and it peters out. The others know that this lack of confidence in myself, being the result of the allowances I make for them (restricted code etc.), is actually a lack of confidence in them. Yet Davy's room is furnished with books by Genet, Camus, Kafka, Robbe-Grillet — hardly restricted code. The link I suppose is that these authors detail dissociation, alienation, and these are the states which, more than even sexuality (for some personality types anyway), cut across class boundaries.

Wednesday April 28th

I've written to Ivo declaring our intention to go ahead with the 'Man on Your Street' project. This because of, not despite, the deposit of reservations in this diary. Nothing more, similarly, has become of my writing discipline. These pages are a way of deadening the superego; fossilising the 'better part of me' so that I am unburdened of it.

I'm thinking in psychological terms of desurgency, low self-esteem, dereliction, all because I've given myself the time required to think about them, and taken

away the distractions which (if only I knew it) are much more than just a negation of these negatives.

Self-dramatisation as escape from adolescent self-obsession.

Actually, I'm not at all in love with this self of mine. It's just what happens to be closest to the hand and eye of my curiosity.

Friday May 7th

There are sheets of water in certain basements and wastegrounds. These I connect with the sight of a corporation sucker lorry, which, it now seems to me, always does its work on Friday nights, and only on Friday nights. As I read Peter Handke I am aware of a droning noise outside which becomes more conspicuous when it suddenly stops.

I return from an Alain Tanner film and leave my room without lights or radio long enough to admire the luminance of the sky. I remember another characteristic of early summer to add to the list I faithfully compile. I also watch torchbeams by the Water of Leith. Two possibilities protect me from astonishment — it is young people, girls on a night out, dallying on the way home to their Stockbridge flats, or it is a policeman searching the riverbank for a missing person.

My right contact lens has a split in it. The streets are fuzzy and I blink often. I pull into the gate of St John's church after my eye fills with tears to ease the discomfort. I can sit on the steps unobserved. I remove the lens, step back onto Lothian Road. I tell myself: well, you can still see adequately, you're not blind after all. Without lenses you think everyone might be an acquaintance — outwardly however you assume you know no-one. Ahead of me were two figures who must have been behind when I stopped at the church gate. One looked like Ana Sarria. The two stopped at a bus-stop. When I looked at the one in the dull blue coat to ascertain if it was Ana, she stepped forward as if to escape my line of vision, and I could see plainly that it was her. Afterwards I felt guilty to be

walking on the streets without a specific assignment. I thought of myself as Ana might see me with her knowledge of my affair with Paula, and my present state. I took Ana's sociable point of view into the service of this guilt. I played several games of Battlezone in Electronic Experience. I was ashamed to be in the arcade. I felt incongruous in my smart suit. When I passed a coin to the young girl I mumbled redundantly into the glass barrier that I wanted five tens. She had a folded music paper beside her. It looked to me like Sounds. I played down the common interest to myself because it brought frightening possibilities into view. Although it was perhaps twenty minutes since I'd passed Ana, I took a long route home to avoid the bus-stop at the West End. There was a gap in some hoardings at Morrison Street. I stepped through to where there was grass. Sun shone across the Western Approach Road. Behind some dilapidated tenements young girls were playing. The combination of wasteground and young girls made me think of rope, and I quickly walked back to the street. I passed the girls on the pavement, half expecting them to shout to me. They were using the words 'bastard' and 'fucking', but not to me. They made me feel naive.

I only had the smart suit on account of Grandpa Currie's funeral. When Father first told me about it he came into my room for the first time in months. It was sunny, early in the afternoon, and he seemed pleasantly surprised at the neatness of the room. He inspected structural details. 'This could make a double guest room.' I asked what he meant by double. 'It could house two people.' He spoke of installing a shower. I said I was happy to take baths in Mother's flat — otherwise I might never visit her, I said. This seemed to have infringed a taboo, and Father said quickly 'Well, I'm off,' and went immediately.

The graveyard was beside the airport — 'the drome', Grandpa Currie called it. We drove there after hearing a lecture, illustrated by a 'Haywain' reproduction, on Grandpa, who was referred to as 'this Christian gentleman'. I stood in the bungalow bow window. A man's red ears were barely an inch in front of my face. I fancied he could hear my expression change. J stood behind me.

At the graveyard it was cold. I held a brown tassel and tried not to let the other pall bearers notice my jerky lowering movements. The scene felt precariously

theatrical. One woman cried. I asked who she was, but nobody knew. I studied the ruddy highlights of a marionette-like old man's face. He wore a multicoloured scarf and had his white hair slicked straight back. I thought some relatives thought me more affected than they. Perhaps I was, but I acted the part in case I wasn't. The undertaker threw earth down into the brown slot. Then grubby men in donkey jackets shifted planks across the gap at the top, leaving chinks which Emma came over to peep through.

The reception was at a hotel overlooking a golfcourse and the sea. We didn't talk to our cousins, although we stood vacantly in halls with them. All the girls filed into a cloakroom — I almost followed them in. To avoid looking foolish I walked instead into a lounge next door. There was an electric fire, some chairs and a Phillips TV, all foursquare against the wall. The sea beyond completed the air of an arty photograph.

In the car home I broke my chill by talking about myself. I accused Mother of neglecting me when I was young. Mark said that I thrived on dissatisfaction — he mistakenly used the word 'tonic'. I said 'Yes, it's the sand in the oyster'. There was silence. We drove through a deserted brownstone town. Mark said 'I don't know where we are.' A sign said: Glasgow 5. Mark was indignant — 'Are we only here?' I said 'but there'll be another sign around the next corner saying Edinburgh 2'.

I am never guilty of public egocentricities. Self-aggrandisement comes naturally when I am able to absorb myself in something with others. I am only ashamed of being able to live alone.

The SNP barbers were a comedy double-act until two solemn young men sat in their chairs.

Every time I dread meeting John I find myself face to face with his mother. She says 'Do drop in, won't you?' I say yes, meaning 'I couldn't possibly'. But perhaps I will.

To absolve myself of the need to find one in flesh and blood, I pin on my wall a picture spread of a beautiful lame *gamine*.

Wednesday May 19th

I am thinking of self-control. I make resolves to rein in my impulses but can't guarantee to myself that I will — or even should — control myself at the moment of transgression. As I think this I am mechanically squeezing toothpaste onto a new green brush. I duck the fresh paste under the running tap — a habit of mine — and the paste is washed away before I can catch it. Like a needless ritual sacrifice — I resolve not to do it again. I apply more toothpaste... and again duck it in the cold water.

There is no point in careering through well-oiled hours helplessly, letting relations lapse left right and centre, and making what few efforts you do for purely negative reasons — you need *y* but you aren't prepared to attempt *z* so you make do with *x*... you simply have to find in yourself the estranged, dependent parties of boss and worker, tutor and student. This shouldn't be hard in one so self-alienated. The tutor challenges, the student, grumbling, makes motions he would otherwise have left unlearned. If you, Nicholas, can't get this going, you'll have to go back to the structured environment where they do it for you. You have to prove to yourself that you can work at something as crazy and religious as writing, otherwise you've been deceiving yourself and everything you've done has been senselessly destructive, and not a preparation for creativity.

Get a story published — accepted — before August. If you can't do this, start reading Gaskell, Eliot and all the rest, and go back to university. Do this as if your life depended on it — maybe it does.

Singing and writing songs are not an end in themselves. They are a poor, worldly cousin of writing which may one day be able to finance it, but in the meantime will always be around to amuse the writer and remind him that his well is a humble one, and his water can be shared.

Monday June 7th

The midnight sky is a deep, deep turquoise and an orange archipelago of clouds stands deeply marked in it.

The night sky, seen from my window bed, makes me whoop with joy. I sit here, straining not to jump out of the window to join the perfection outside. Botanic garden flowers, tree smells, botany exhibition yesterday, beautiful and enlightening (we depend for our breath on plants). Sophocles, grave and elemental, like light southern soil packed into a stern, wise, slightly cruel shape. The Passage, nervy fanatical songs full of immensity and what-it's-like-to-be-alive-and-realise-the-implications. So sad amidst my vacancy, which means I'm able to be seized by sudden happiness, delight in small things, in thoughts and pieces of play, in a letter from Keith, in a little archeology through my schoolbooks and old stories — simple pottering. Life is so ramshackle, so full of oddness and grandeur. Melancholy and guilty at my lack of self-control, wishing myself more mature, more disciplined, more wise, more likeable, I nonetheless find space in the roomscape of jumble, under a crazy summer sky, to love things. Every day closer to death, every void, joyless patch of time, adds to the weight of a pleasure, an understanding of *the way to live*, inside me. Hungry in uncomfortable heat, restrained but playful and expressive on the way, with John, to a tennis game, I am forced, against some squat, timid part of me, to understand how much there is yet to find out about the world and people and creation, and how much this can fill me up with everything life-affirming.

All this perhaps depends on a slight dying — it's a born-again elation springing from temporary psychic setbacks such as occurred on Friday (Garrick with Syuzen & Happy Family — madman, Pat, my isolation) and Saturday (college, spying on indignant sunbather neighbours).

Tuesday June 22nd

A restless night — blood pressure felt high, heart beat like a rusty plunger, breath was laced with dull pain. I couldn't find any music soft enough, so I squinted my closed eyes until I saw lights, and pretended to accept the death I had ridiculously been fearing throughout the night, lapsing into a half-hearted yogi trance.

After three hours sleep I found myself quite refreshed, set about signing on, then back to sing 'The Man on Your Street' from cover to cover. Wrote the finishing touches of The Lapse and was pleased by it.

Then to Mother's flat to wash my clothes. She has forbidden this. She comes in while the cycle is still running. We argue.

'I haven't a penny for the launderette,' I say.

'I haven't a penny either — I've mortgaged my soul to the bank for the next four months to pay off my overdraft for Moray Place.'

'If neither of us has a penny we should be in league, not at each other's throats!'

'You might at least have hung the wet sheet on the line, kept the process in motion instead of blocking the process!'

'I just come down here trying to leave no trace of my insect-like being.'

'If you choose to live on the dole rather than staying at university then you can reckon without bringing your insect-like being down to this flat.'

'I really don't understand what your objection to being on the dole is based on. Is it on economic or moral grounds?'

'Moral! I object to supporting you just so that you can hang around all day, doing nothing productive.'

‘But I am doing something productive, writing songs, and I think they’re important! And it gives me immense satisfaction to do it.’

‘Well, that’s fine for you, but what about other people — don’t you think they’d like to have that kind of satisfaction? But they realise that you have to be responsible. We’d all like to write, but we have to earn a living first.’

‘I’m quite happy to scrape by, living just below the breadline, as long as I can do what’s important to me. And I think the difference between people who just write for a hobby and people who are really serious about it is that the serious people are completely irresponsible, economically — like Dostoyevsky, they gamble away their life savings...’

‘So you’re comparing yourself with Dostoyevsky? I’m sure there are thousands of pathetic little nobodies who think they’re Dostoyevsky, who justify themselves like that.’

I laugh. ‘Well, I was just using him as an example.’

But really, how useful is it to internalise such a tooth and claw little mother? Such puritanism is rare these days, and refreshing as a cold bath. The fact that nobody, under such unflagging scorn, can be fully self-satisfied, is no obstacle to the efforts of the would-be vain of the world to steel themselves, by sheer virtue on their own terms, against such attacks.

Friday October 15th

It’s probably just autumn which has made me restless and death-conscious enough to take myself to task in these pages again, but I’ve been wondering whether I haven’t perfected an insidious, lifelong blind man’s buff of dissimulation — making convincing little dashes on a rugby pitch to disguise flight from the centre of play — which has pulled to wool over my own eyes as much as anyone else’s. This *selective* self-consciousness has allowed me to discard hours and years of vacant, lazy, habit-cushioned existence and base all my

self-esteem, arrogance and future plans on the tiny germs of talent deposited in school magazines, doodles, songs and short stories. I have lacked the grasp of the world’s essentially unmethodical, amoral... in effect, godless, Day-of-Judgmentless, unaccounted-for-ness... nature — the grasp which would have made me discard small, cumulative virtues like, say, reading old school textbooks, as I’ve been doing recently (accountancy reinstated).

But really all that is — so I believe — preparation for an ever more faceted, therefore invulnerable, worldview such as is the artist’s most central asset, such as has been my own object for the education others have lavished on me, the motivation for my theft of this education, my reason for avoiding its price in final exam / career repayment.

This evening, after a depressing practice, I probed Neill about his split attitudes to his training / gift and, on the other hand, his playing with us. This separation of *langue* from *parole*, angel from whore, I said, perplexed and disappointed me. The group ought to be able to expand to the dimensions of our greatest talents, we ought to bring our most fanatical seriousness to bear on it, and Neill shouldn’t think it a step down from his early days when he could still play piano brilliantly, and would still spend two years writing a symphony (‘complete with trills on tubas and instructions for the violins to play notes they didn’t physically have’). But, thinking about it since then, I see that the group as it now is just can’t be taken seriously as a vehicle for the barrier-breaking, dedicated side I, and I hope Neill, feel in ourselves.

For me, although it’s novel and even a source of pride to have a record coming out, which is also a story of sorts, it’s not anything like the achievement I really expect from myself, and in terms of demanding discipline and stamina, and discovering unsuspected (but counted-on) wisdom or compassion, it hasn’t even scratched the surface.

But the standards these absolute and limitless white pages always goad me into professing for myself are simply, like the pages, the absoluteness of a void rather than an edifice.

For this reason the moral rigour these pages draw out of such an intermittently moral person is a waste of the space that has inspired it. Only vividness of faith in experience is real, and this faith is betrayed when conclusions are sucked out of the life that originated and validated them.

I'm reading books about the Baader-Meinhof gang, death as perceived in childhood, music, the murder of Webern, economics, Beirut, and architecture. Or rather snatches of all of these, along with Alasdair Gray's 'Lanark', a wonderful video of Chekhov's 'Three Sisters', Racine's 'Phedre', Tolstoy's 'Death of Ivan Illich', Open University lectures, etc. Does the resulting mosaic do more than pass my dole-bought time? Does it really build into a new plane of compassion, understanding?

Perhaps because of weather & season but perhaps because of dilettantish refinement, I'm pained by daily dutiful walks in the city. Traffic is so noisy and heavy, people so uniformly avert their eyes from mine, there's so much evidence of pastiche (the new 20s canopy for the Caledonian Hotel) and poverty (more beggars than ever) and crass, brash provincial industry without any higher function than its own perpetuation.

Yet my decision to hide from it is just another inch of distance in the general alienation of this city (and others probably worse) from its own humanisation. And the (absurdly 'total-universe-ish', moral) question returns: Is it possible to cook significances aesthetically without an ingredients list of local, earth-caked, vegetation? Is that why my diary notes are so starved of *objects*?

Steve wants to live alone because Alison represents to him unfreedom and domestication of his swearing tongue, though they both helped each other through the death of respective parents (Steve's in a mountaineering accident). Neill had to help an old lady neighbour (and the whole neighbourhood seems a city of the almost-dead) out of her fluidless, sticklike immobility on her flat floor. Webern, having recovered from severe dysentery and survived World War II with only bad nerves to show for it, bewildered his wife by coming into their son-in-

law's dining room saying 'I'm hit... it's all over,' and dying as a result of the guilty nervousness of an alcoholic US cook named Bell.

Going back to paragraph 1, I'm aware of awaiting a maturity in myself, and biding my time until it arrives. But does such biding not itself replace one kind of maturity with another, say an idealistic kind with a pragmatic kind?

The universal solipscist's illusion: 'I am an incredibly complex moral being with a past and a future whereas others are simple creatures capable of behaving in only one way, caught in the present, coping by habit alone... why, it's the evidence of these eyes!'

Friday October 15th

Maybe at this very moment you are allowing abilities to fall into disrepair which later could spare you physical pain or the mental suffering of knowing you have not fulfilled your promise. ('Ivan Ilyich')

Saturday October 16th

By leaving full-time education I have made education absolute and limitless (inconclusive); by failing to take up work I have abolished leisure.

And if I could see myself now and offer myself advice I'd say 'For heaven's sake leave these nunnish observations, this puritan morality book, and turn to a sensual wrestle with the black cloth white paint part of yourself.

Sunday October 17th (early hours)

Reading Russell's account of Romantic individualism, which I scorn as I traipse through its familiar landscape perched on his shoulder, I am suddenly sobered by two paragraphs ending in the two sentences: 'Hence the type of man encouraged by romanticism, especially of the Byronic variety, is violent and anti-social, an anarchic rebel or a conquering tyrant' and 'If we could all live solitary

and without labour, we could all enjoy this ecstasy of independence; since we cannot its delights are only available to madmen and dictators.'

The first of these sentences recalls 'Baal', which I've been critically dismantling on record, my guitar, and Paul's video tape recently. Last night I read Esslin's 'Brecht: A Choice of Evils' on the contradictoriness of B's character ('Reason versus Instinct'). Another extract from Russell shows the Germanic romantic predictability of his apparently rational espousal of communism: 'The German romantics were young the last years of the eighteenth century, and it was while they were young that they gave expression to what was most characteristic in their outlook. Those not fortunate enough to die young, in the end allowed their individuality to be obscured in the uniformity of the Catholic church. (A romantic could become a Catholic if he had been born a Protestant, but could hardly be a Catholic otherwise, since it was necessary to combine Catholicism with revolt.)' Strict communism, of course, being the equivalent to those born into Protestant-nurtured capitalism.

The second sentence and the text leading up to it (romantic rebel setting up self as god) reminded me uncomfortably of myself. Not only do I live solitary and without labour, enjoying ecstasies of independence, but I have released a record subtitled 'Songs from the Career of *Dictator* Hall' with a blasphemous world on the cover and sleeve notes telling prospective settlers in my creation that 'it will become a home from home'. Leaving aside the transparent envy and yearning Russell betrays in his little moral, it's worrying that every escape into romanticism's opposite (epic theatre, political rather than impressionistic subject matter, etc) simply expands the romantic domain.

Perhaps I'm still in Bowie's shadow (he combines solipcism, rebellion, madness and dictatorship unrelentingly and irresistibly), but I'd like to think, and have been thinking recently, that it's time for a classicism in my writing, as much indebted to the ideals of functional architecture and serialist music as to Brecht and Auden. Rather than putting together a sequence of chords based on conventional values of emotional colour (this one wistful, this brash and comical, with always a dash of the opposite to provide irony and depth), then adding

words as an entertaining confection (not without serious intention and allusion to Brecht etc, but ramshackle and inconsistent, shot off by fortunate moments of possibility provided by the laxness of the musical progression) — rather than this previous writing, I mean to try something based on an equivalence of formal structure with the structure of the content of the idea: only with this strictness can songs be *about* something rather than just alluding to something. No longer can the medium be the message, or even serve as an aid to dryness of inspiration. At this point I wonder whether this is not something inevitable which happens almost subconsciously in the artistic process; that you may think you're weak and simply responding to inbuilt potentialities in the material, when in fact every decision you make is guided by the structure of the idea at the back of your head.

But still, this is one level more superficial than the structuralism (!) I'm talking about, because it uses off-the-peg components, and simply makes sentences out of their prepackaged meanings (like a modern architect making a new house out of window-frames etc. from a Victorian catalogue — he can still be modern, but he won't be able to shake off associations with nineteenth century buildings, and will be doomed to a kind of eccentric pastiche rather than innovation).

It's always frightening and risky to discard the traditional wisdom and richness of association built into conventional forms, but there comes a time when these qualities stultify thought rather than informing. I'm convinced that a musical / narrative style that really mirrored and *delivered up* the idea for which it was devised would stand out, and be instantly recognisable as truly innovative and effective to a degree that no superficial slickness of arrangement or production could be.

Of course, to say all this about 'pop music' seems ridiculous if one looks at the charts, listens to the radio or even our own two records, faintly original though I hope they are. Never mind how many people listen to records, the question arises: what kind of ears does the 'listening' public have, what is the condition of their attention? And my optimistic, arrogant answer: something true enough, expressed with the force of originality, gains its power by challenging lazy ears

(giving them something worth working for) and stirring attention with a familiar skeleton in new skin.

Pop music is a parody of a challenge: 'wake up!' shout so many records, when structurally they're saying 'sleep on!' The loudness of a live gig drives a thrill of fear through the nervous system which is a parody of the thrill of appreciation of depth and subtlety, daring and truth. Perhaps in a live context this is excusable; it's a one-off diversion (although if the next gig offers only a repeat, it already loses impact each time, like screen violence), and the ritual abandonment of drink, sweat and rhythm tend to short-circuit any keener appetites; the need for variety and the rest of it. But on a record, where everything is judged, screened and controlled and where live 'excitement' is just another mood to be evoked with the aid of the appropriate switches, on a record any level of subtlety is possible.

It might be objected to my charge that pop is pastiche and convention, that this *is* due to an equivalence of structure of idea to structure of form, if as the idea, or essence, of pop we take mass entertainment. This is pop as the glue (in both senses: bond and cheap opiate) of society; produced, perhaps, by individuals and listened to by individuals, but truly meaningful, structurally, at the level of sales and charts, and actually listened to by individuals as a sensual expression of these abstract fetishes (reification); thus the mysterious glamour of fame, which is the immortal power of a crowd reflected from an individual, mortal face; and thus, also, the strange sound of critics, on this evening's Radio Forth record review programme, equating their enjoyment of a record directly with its likely chart success and money-spinning potential.

In fact, if we're talking about the *structure* of an art producing-appreciating relationship and not the common-mannish fantasies a particular genre of that relationship excite, we have to think in terms of individuals. An individual is the smallest divisible unit of consciousness, the atom of perception. If, instead of mass entertainment, we take as the idea or essence of a song the expression of any sort of perception (including that narrow repertoire of sentimental perceptions favoured by mass entertainment vendors and aspirants to fame and

other abstract expressions of abstract humanity's favour), then we find the exchange taking place unambiguously (and perhaps embarrassingly personally) on an individual plane, that is, able to evoke individual experience beyond language.

Of course there's nothing scientific in all this, despite the pseudo-technical terms. The matching of form to content is simply an individualised version of the matching of form to popular convention, and because it is done deeper in the individual, it achieves a deeper universality, less diluted by the conventions of the form itself, or the false universality of ever-narrowing prescriptive popularity (the phenomenon of people identifying with the song because it has the gloss and 'presence' of a hit, the right credentials, etc, rather than their actually being moved or attracted by it, something like the self-fulfilling prophecies of stock-market confidence).

In fact my definition of the essence of song as the expression of perception shows how literary my conception of song is. If it were just music at issue, I would have to agree with Schoenberg that the idea or essence is the twelve tone system. As it is I've plumped for meaning, which is, rather than the alphabet, the basic component of language (though it is wider than verbal language).

On a purely theoretical level, serialism does say 'the medium is the message'. That's why all serial composers, and Schoenberg in particular, have emphasised that the technique itself is unimportant, and is not a substitute for composing, that is, finding a subject and a form.

Wednesday November 24th

Since the last entry The Happy Family has effectively split (Neill & I played devil's advocate to each other's greater ambitions and formed a huddle from which the others were excluded)... and tentatively reformed to promote the LP next month. Invitations from Sweden and Holland are flying around, but alas don't look very feasible.

The next step (new beginning in a line of new beginnings) is our Sparta opera — set in a Corinth guesthouse in the second half of the fifth century BC. I don't want to say anything about it here because these pages tend to act like weedkiller on the head's garden.

It's getting darker, colder and wetter daily, which is actually quite stimulating. The city becomes much more hostile than it usually seems, shop windows grow to ten times their previous importance, people tug umbrellas privately over their faces as they approach.

The week started for me with a visit to the High Court for jury service, for which I wasn't required. It was a rape case ('... that you did insert a bottle into her private parts and a penis into her mouth...' intoned the big-faced, husbandish lawyer) and I was quite relieved not to have to change my mind about human nature as a result of hearing the gory details from 10 different angles (actually it would have been a clutter of evidence, unnecessarily profuse, for one small file in my opinion cabinet marked 'Stupid but Understandable Deeds'). When the judge gave us permission to leave I passed all the Monday morning policemen, clerks, commissionaires, glanced without much interest at the great historic hall and down stone corridors lined with filing chests, left Parliament Square and made for the university. Here things get talked about, people make themselves passably attractive to the eye, and there are clean and well-lit spaces. After a while it gets oppressive for these same reasons; the rest of the city, with its puddled paving, grimy orange-postered windows, black derelict churches, hopeless working people, dole-drawers and television-watchers, rises up behind the university with a dour, derisory expression on its face.

All the galleries got new exhibitions this week. None of them would tempt you to catch a London tube if there were listed in Time Out, but it's worthwhile just to see these familiar, loved white rooms kitted out with someone else's latest sadness and pride and joy. This is a principle I apply to my own room, it's the principle that if you can't physically escape, it may be more than enough to shift the furniture or set the alarm for an earlier hour... or write a musical, which is a very efficient means of education, like everything subtle and constructive.

Perhaps it's more intensive dreaming or perhaps it's the fever induced by whipping weather (always worst the last 100 metres before one arrives at one's door), but this season really does bring up some very strange tastes and smells and pictures inside me. A bookshop lady's perfume is sweet and brittle, rye bread and smoky tea are like Dostoyevsky on the tongue, a single bar electric heater on cool naked legs is a deception of ten forgotten love affairs. If you go without what you need, it rears up before you, bigger than you can remember or imagine the real thing, almost inside the frame of the five senses. That this is sheer forgetfulness, a sign of the feebleness of your experience, is no objection. The almost-taste, almost-feel, almost-sight is substantially there, a heady comfort.

Two Melbourne exiles in one evening: a Rudolf Steiner lecturer from that city perched on the line of pedagogy and was swayed by a stiff breeze of incredulity for an hour. Then, directly across the street, The Birthday Party sang out masturbation cartoons for an apprentice-scrappermerchant's conference in Coaster's.

I have all the time in the world for all the world's great books and records, I ignite a mixture of the air of myself with the petrol of half-planned apparitions and motor cockeyed through a routine which is a procession of explicable but unexplained curiosities. And this adds up, most of the time, to something which is *sufficient*, even quite life-affirming, satisfying the requirements of growth, fantasy, modesty, ambition — all inside the quotation marks of the 'Just-For-Now'.

There's a single out by Abba just now called 'The Day Before You Came' — a catalogue of ordinary measures given poignancy by the 'you' convention, which is only presented in the chorus, the title, so that the details of the verses, the 'before', stands out sharp and clear like reality itself. 'You' could signify revolution, summer, fame, the new video, or whatever else we invent to discredit the present minute.

When you're young, being happy doesn't depend on what you do — you're happy. When you're old, being happy depends on what you do — and what you do depends on what you did when you were young.

Thursday November 25th

Cut the privet hedge because that is what the passersby see. But let it run to rack and run and instead turn the soil if you mean to admit visitors.

Goethe's 'Faust'. The little black poodle he sees outside the city walls trailing some supernatural aura is like the dog Kafka saw on a walk with Janouch, who, like Wagner, had to reassure him that it was perfectly banal, and not some messenger from the spirit world. The K anecdote comes from 'Conversations with Kafka', the title of which comes from 'Conversations with Goethe'.

About Pavese's story 'Houses': in the sparse scenes with dialogue there's a masterful and strategic fuzziness in the understanding which evokes naiveté and adolescence; the time when you don't quite grasp what people say to and see in each other, and admire them all the more for it. My dismal position is that what has dissolved away since adolescence has been the admiration rather than the incomprehension, and this is stupid.

I drain myself into this book rather than singing into it, crest and peak. It distorts me; meanwhile I squander my best humour on unsuspecting provincial shoppers.

The moon is a stage property
Composed of flour and water
Hiding a ramshackle skeleton
Of horny brown scaffolding.
The moon is a puppet
And its man is without
A tittle of information
To hook his name to.

What is a dusty track
Without a direction
And all colour
Embarrassed clean out of it?
It is the moon.

When the master is happy
The dog
— No matter how melancholy —
Waves its impartial tail.

The dog's first rule:
Never lick the dangling
Or forgotten hand.

A headcold rattled like a crockery set
Inside a cardboard box
As the yellowing page of a mockery book
Sang 'Cook one strumpet fox!'

Friday November 26th

My new glasses (round ones like Pavese's or Neill's) make things so sharp that the world (especially at dusk, when the rearing equestrian statue on Princes Street makes a perfect silhouette against a rather vulgar pink and blue backdrop, balanced by the fussy mass of the castle on the left) is made to look as false as large format advertising photography in a tourist brochure.

It sounds banal and is therefore true that Edinburgh seemed like a much bigger and more vibrant city when I was small. The two westernmost blocks of Princes Street with a profusion of trees on one side and the life and colour of cinemas and coffee rooms on the other — obviously a summer, perhaps a Festival memory — were an extension of Sasek's double page view of Princes Street in 'This is Edinburgh', which took its rightful place beside 'This is Paris', giving a very

similar general view of a city of seething coloured squares — St George's green dome puncturing the vibrancy with no less authority than the Eiffel Tower. Being able to cycle about the streets in 1968 brought the scale down a bit, but the biggest shock came when we went to Athens. Sent back to Turnhouse and the environs of Ferry Road (even although from the Botanic Gardens, my one consolation, Edinburgh gives its best account of itself), I delighted in telling John Thomson that Edinburgh was nothing but 'a cluster of shacks on the horizon' — I think he made me modify this to 'a cluster of historically notable shacks'. This impression was a result of flying over the place, then seeing it from a similar but horizontal distance in skyline. It became a word describing itself rather than a series of routes, known shops and flats, institutions.

'Congratulations,' he said, 'you have discredited your needs and you have found holes in your highest ambitions (holes can however be found in anything). You are a happy person.' I knew that what he said was true, and immediately felt something between shame and annoyance. 'But I don't want to be happy,' I exclaimed. 'All those wretched people whose one object is contentment, who brave hell, high water, and evenings out with the boys to capture their fleeting moments of the stuff, are cheated of it, and I, who want a certain dramatic tension in my life yet who defer it out of sheer anxiety and, deviously, expect it to visit me nonetheless, I am rewarded for my lack of greed and my lack of human frailty by this sickly contentment, which descends over my affairs like snow falling on a provincial Sunday.' He smiled and nodded down at his clasped hands. 'Yes, you don't specialise in the pursuit of happiness, and so your share of it seeps into your system evenly and unbidden, unasked for and received like a due — mother's milk, in fact. As a result you have nothing to do and you get nothing done.' He was showing me to the door, where he hesitated and, seeing the expression on my face, seemed to take pity on me, although this was the last thing I wanted. 'But all this —' he patted my shoulder — 'qualifies you as a truly moral person, someone who feels the pull of both good and bad deeds, and can sort one from the other according to some rule of his own making. And for this reason you are well set to become something — this is rare enough, many are after all ready to take themselves for granted and chase something, whereas you chase nothing and so become yourself. And a self realised in this fashion can,

when it sooner or later feels the pull, have something to do and do it with a good sense of the value of the doing.' I wasn't sure that I still followed his words, I mistrusted the optimism of these parting remarks, and I was brooding on the subject of happiness. I would have to go away to be by myself and think the insight through. Absently I shook his hand, repaid the significant-looking smile he gave me, and hurried out of the building, eager not to be distracted by the fine, sharp winter morning it had meanwhile become.

Today I looked in the medicine cabinet and knew that, in good time, there would be women; either a depth or a profusion, a singularity or a multitude of women, just as I walk through streets at night and know that, although I am contentedly alone, there are couples behind red curtains intensely together, clinging. Living alone, then, is a holiday from the onus; it's a mortal interim, and its mortality endears it to me.

Anything vital will be present in the long run, and everything trivial can be neglected for the time being. If, as philosophers suspect, there are only three important facts, this is the way to spin out the learning of these facts over the time one expects to live, without having to descend to the cluttered tiers of more complex and less important truth. This virtue is naive in the way that children are naive who must always penetrate through clouds of detail to the fact — one of the three — of the matter. (Of course, I'll have to wait to have children before I know if they really do this, or just lock into why-circles of detail.)

The superficial difference and deeper affinity of 'To Have' with 'Have To'. The first is the products, right side up, and 'To' is the label with its name. The second is the product, upside down, and 'to' is the price tag.

A deeper and more positive relation exists between 'To live' and 'Live to'. Here the meaning accrued by inversion isn't obligation but the advance from a static objective to a dynamic subjective — from description to intention, science to art.

Christ was essentially a writer and the disciples biographers: like all writers he could not bear to let the chance occurrences of his life pass without construing

them according to his way of seeing life (Christianity) and binding them retrospectively into a mesh of meaning. The disciples documented and interpreted his works — the first critics. Actually, the analogy of the performance artist may seem more appropriate, but there the self-conscious use of *art* takes some of the sincerity and egotism out of the work. The confessional novelist, the diarist, in fact all solipsists who think that everything that happens in the world is a kind of coded message for them alone, are descended from Christ. Their immortality depends on their belief that the meaning they have read into the world is at once an embodiment of themselves (true enough) and also able to outlive them, hanging together by its own self-evidence. We should be allowed this egotism because the ghastly, vacant alternative is a senseless frittering in a random universe. Religion and its secular brothers are a fire in the dark, without them there is only sex and death. These are the three facts.

Sunday November 28th

Theme after seeing Brecht's 'Mother': how the universal chameleon faculty, the ability to get on with people and to make everyone feel essentially similar to oneself, works against real social harmony in the same way that small acts of charity work against a *structural* form of social justice — 'Small changes are the enemy of great changes.' How we 1) willingly hide our idiosyncrasy and our moral scruple, thus letting ourselves be made hypocrites and saving ourselves from the profound socialisation of moral argument (the two socialisations) and 2) expect others to make even wildly alien beliefs palatable; at the Steiner lecture, for instance, the discomfort caused by the lack of any *attempt* to sugar the pill or model the dogma with human, recognisable, familiar features. This is like Father saying 'Entertain me!' and expecting the tricks of the entertainer's trade to be sufficient to take any effort, danger, and over-personal hectoring out of the communication (which can still be described as such because, as someone on an Irish radio station I picked up last week was saying, all reporting, or here entertaining, is *crusading*, overtly or covertly, and a crusader doesn't just impart but *elicits*). In this sense, my feeling of hiding can be generalised: hiding is a social principle, built into public as well as personal communication. The convention rather than the content prevails, and the convention says 'Any

content will pass itself on more smoothly if it lathers itself with my soap'. Perhaps this is all quite valid, it occurs to me, and probably there is no content without convention (Liam Hudson).

Ron Brown was fined £50 for shouting at the PM 'You're not welcome here, Thatcher!' The judge said that the message had been a threat to free speech. Obviously he understands something very particular by the phrase 'free speech' (judges are after all paid to put complex interpretations on confused, if well-intentioned words) — he means a set of conventions which empower a majority to be listeners, and therefore leave a minority free to speak to them unimpeded by dialogue. Institutionalised hiding. 'Free speech' has rendered 'nobodies' incapable of responding and 'personalities' incapable of listening. But there is no speech outside of conventions which ordain silence — without conventions speech is babble.

After the Brecht play a middle-class man who had been flexing his head throughout as if following prescribed exercises to relieve neck pain met a senior captain-of-industry type of his acquaintance. 'How did you like the play?' asked the boss. 'Oh, it was too *direct* for me,' the younger man, who looked like a manager of the lowest rank, replied. I imagined the old man losing respect for the younger, whilst knowing that he couldn't safely have approved the communist play.

But this directness deliberately offers no haven, no ambiguity (although the audience's laughter in the second part of the play at the mildly humorous antics of the schoolmaster, and their obvious affection for the actress rather than the acts of Pelagea Vlassova, showed that there was determination to *make* a space, as the snickers of a lecture audience at a *double entendre* force the lecturer to make some harmless crack which earths the alienation. This isn't to say that Brecht didn't write this humour into the play, just that it distinguishes between the theorist and the playwright in him).

Esslin describes 'The Mother' as dry and puritanical, and all I've written above, equating content and personality with moral scruple, implies that people are

carriers of morality rather than expressers of empathy. But my suspicion of empathy, like Moliere's misanthrope's suspicion of the affections of a courtier who doesn't even know him, is based on the painful sense of being seen through and not seen; in a way it's better to be rejected for a real reason than accepted as just another *per se* 'valuable' person. As Moliere's pro / antagonist says, to say that all men are equally valuable is to say they're also equally worthless; it's to cheat the exception of his rightful praise or blame, and thus to smooth away all exceptions.

The attraction of all structures, institutions, which differentiate. Then the disillusionment when they prove to do so without reference to the subject: Christianity claims to distinguish sheep from goats but says we're all sinners. University, factory, quiz show, all *impose* the quality which they then use to differentiate subjects. Only the arts, for me, really differentiate because each subject, each artist, sets the terms of his differentiation. We're only equal when we're differentiated on dissimilar criteria, in other words when we can each choose our own personal god.

Better to have faults which help one to accept other people than to strive only for perfection and end up despising people.

For instance, pompousness.

Wednesday December 1st

Mother (just as the pen was about to form the M she rang my bell) said yesterday 'Graham asked me — "How did you and BC get on in 1965?" and I couldn't tell him. I just can't remember how things were then.'

I took one of two old Penguin copies of Chekhov's plays from her shelves; one was hers, the other Father's. But the one with her name on the fly had Father's green biro notes dissecting and desiccating it, as if they'd been tumbled together indiscriminately. I wonder if either of them remembers or attaches any significance to this? They watched as I took one copy away.

When you're experiencing something you expect, without really thinking about it, to remember it at will later. But only a conscious preservative effort actually makes parts of the flux stay with you.

I got up today at about 12.30, saw that it was a clear day softened by mist and bonfire smoke, listened to some traditional Japanese music, ate muesli and an end of Polish rye bread, drank a customary cup of Lapsang Souchong tea, and decided to go to the German lecture at the university. George Street was sunny and eternal-looking, every prospect was more impressive because of the light mist, the city was like an innocent corner of the 18th century. Expecting to miss the lecture because of the irregularity of George Street buses, I walked some of the way. People in their peaty grey combinations of clothing looked happy from the bus, and I thought of each person as a travelling element temporarily out of context. A childish girl with a dark green plastic coat and an orange rucksack sat at the front of the bus, and looked sympathetic. At the university I discovered that there were no lectures on Wednesday afternoons, and spent a while looking at noticeboards. I took the address of an East German girl wanting to correspond in English.

After a spell in the library basement cafe and a browse in Better Books I settling in the high Fine Art library illustrations wing and read Barron's 'Artists in the Making' (which I'm ashamed to be seen reading, and am loath to show to the stern and gruff librarian). Character sketches of young creative writers, to give me a sense of community. The splendid view as the chink of Old Town visible from the sky down to the dusty car parks so far below. Bread from the Grassmarket shop. At home, sat watching six spots of fire amongst the trees near the river which flared up and danced with an archaic air. I let the room darken and listened to Eno's 'Possible Musics' while watching the play of smoke, fire and headlights. This brought a deep sense of purgation and stillness and a slight reddening of the rims of my eyes. Then I read a Chekhov playlet, 'The Bear', to complement the one I read last night, 'A Jubilee'. Looked through 'Myth in Ancient Greek Art'. Planned to listen to tonight's Reith lecture and perhaps see the film 'Moonlighting' at the Filmhouse. I write all this to give a sample solitary,

unproductive and happy day's events, rather than the more abstract inner life I usually record. I don't know whether I should be dissatisfied with this kind of pottering and gradual, tipping education, or whether I should just live it moment by moment as I have always done. I feel as if I'm more spiritual than most of the busy people I pass in the street, and although I don't do anything to help other people, my disposition towards the world is on the whole tender and well-wishing, and it's for this reason that I rail against certain of its faces.

Sunday December 5th

I've written a scene and a half of 'The Corinth Authority' in iambic pentameter with rhyming line ends, like Moliere's 'Misanthrope'. Won't talk about it here unless it threads in with the argument which may develop.

That Reith lecture I mentioned really impressed me, put my partially irrational need to leave university in a reasonable though radical light. Critics reviewing the programme blew their dignity, adding to Donoghue's mistrust of their species; for example Hoggart, who D had described as 'going along with conventional wisdom' kept saying that D was simply mouthing familiar ideas. All complained of his devotional approach to art, as if the worst possible mistake a critic could make would be to entertain the same faculties, of feeling and intuition, as artists themselves. This relates to notes I was making for 'Corinth'; people respect otherness, and this respect keeps them at the distance they choose for themselves. Neill, for instance, has so much respect for musicianship and great composers that to presume to rival them fills him with dread (he convinces me that he has the need to compose by saying 'I'm so full of rhythm and melody that Gillian gets infuriated by my constant tapping and humming in bed' then, when I give him full initiative for the 'Corinth' music, says he lies awake sweating, 'to Gillian's annoyance'). But if my cultivated devil-may-care insolence allows me to write, does it lend the gravity of good writing?

Observation: all my favourite writing pretends to be comedy (that is, disrespectful) but is in deadly earnest ('The Cherry Orchard', 'The Good Person of Szechuan', 'The Trial', 'The Misanthrope', 'Waiting for Godot'). Its playfulness

and readiness to entertain give this writing an unpretentious surface under which an injected contradictory melancholy can percolate devastatingly. This seems a very mature and unforceable writing voice, resulting perhaps from the slow assault of experience on the youthful high-spiritedness of optimistic natures (and despite the evidence of these yellowbound complaints I'm also such an optimist, at least tonight, and aren't lifetimes just a string of tonights and todays?).

The future begins as little reverberations and recurrences of novel strands of belief, and I can tonight foretell a more committed future for myself, full of a more grave understanding of the tall responsibility which faces people who expect to live untroubled into the next century. What will we decide about war, hunger, genetic engineering, social change? And if we are not given any say in the matter, what actions will we take to correct this? Brecht's 'Galileo', an unpretentious play courageous enough to be *about* something narrower than cheap untampered-with universalities, puts a how-I-see (the end concern of many artists) at the service of a how-to-live (politics; the bookends of the day-to-day and, in its wider sense, the text lines between which the self-sufficient, tragically but consolingly, read themselves).

Dilemma: one has a nature which says 'all in good time, experience can't be hurried, a life is a long-limbed creature which must find its own pace' but one lives in a time which says 'if you want a tomorrow you can feel at home in you'd better rummage about amongst the unpleasantness taking root in the today' — clearly a job without a retirement. Or, put another way, there's this immobilising intuition which says 'bed down in your nature, learn to live with it because you'll be sleeping partners for six decades, which for subjective purposes is forever' and there's the contradictory alarm-call saying 'choose fight or flight, it's later than they let you think, no time to contemplate a navel which may not be around in five years'.

In no other century, surely, has the world been so dull or so dangerous. The dullness obtains because of the disparity in scale between personal actions and the danger, itself the greatest giver of passivity.

What these notes aspire to is a condition of factless authority, which they achieve by the absence of any reader. They have the dignity of the bedecked brothel visitors of 'The Balcony' when the whores have left them alone for five minutes.

A man whose salary was paid in library tickets was granted all the authority he could keep to himself.

Monday December 6th

A talk with Mother some nights ago in which I caught myself saying that all the boys I knew who lived with girls did so out of some innate weakness. 'That's a bit puritanical, isn't it?' said Mother. And I was ashamed of having said it, without however changing my opinion. Somebody else's opinion, which I once adopted magpie-fashion, is that weakness is the same as soul. I've always thought that I could have more soul on my own, but this perhaps depends on having the absence of a partner accented from time to time.

Last night I performed this function by reading the May - June 1981 diary account of the Hanna episode — when my need for someone pulled the motivation rug from under the spindly feet of my other preoccupations ('I can't remember what I used to do — or rather what made it worth doing'). Wrote her a letter in a fuel-the-olympic-flame gesture; this flame can of course be housed anywhere. An excerpt: 'but in retrospect this letter seems to be a creepy and self-sorry weeping into wreckage'.

An essential part of the self-opening experience of, for example, this afternoon's bonfire-watching, crouching on my £40 (which I didn't pay) swing chair and peering through the glittering louvres of the blind at the surgency of fire and serenity of resultant smoke amongst the dark branches, an essential part of this childlike delight which sends prickles of love and yearning for some spirit-world which I almost immediately integrate into myself, into the here and now, an essential part of all this is the knowledge that domesticity wouldn't permit it, and that even someone well-suited to fruitful dreaminess and prepared to exercise it

crouching alongside me, even this possible lover would alter and tame the experience.

To read 'Minima Moralia' with any agreement is to sadden a subsequent walk in the streets. Signs in shop windows and what you read into passing stares and the aggressive darts cars make all seem to confirm Adorno's idea about the veil of smoke thrown up around essential capitalism actually revealing quite clearly the nature of its manufacturer. But to come across a van full of people looking co-operative, on some mission based perhaps on the eros principle, becomes a great consolation, whereas to another state of mind it might have loomed up between camera and hifi shops like a sort of tatty threat.

Monday December 13th

The purpose of my life is to invent a religion out of the darker side of myself and give it expression.

As western values swamp the mystical east, so the spoils brought back by merchants — art, music, religion — can kindle the lost spirituality in a new hearth; continuity maintained by, rather than in spite of, change.

Is immaturity simply lack of respect for life, for the pathos of everything living? And if so, isn't this because the young haven't thought enough about death, felt it, as Neill does literally, in their bones?

To say that literature is a club of aloneness is commonplace. But to put on a gregarious front and escape from this good cliché into a hubbub of more exotic clichés is wrong. Instead you should give the fabric of hoarded days a wrist-flick and find a style.

Here's a somewhat thin sample of fabric: shortly after I dressed, mid-afternoon on a cold day in which the gardens showed patchy remnants of snow through the dusty windows, Neill arrived. 'Low' was on, then I played 'Tin Drum' — in the space of these records we discussed how to impress the BBC man who's coming

on Wednesday to audition us for Street Buzz. Neill was also hurt that I should be thinking of doing more recording work with The Happy Family, rather than just with him; 'I don't like the feeling that I could play the bass better myself — I just don't see why you want to keep working with Ronnie and Davy, apart from some sort of kind-heartedness to the unemployed'.

And really, when challenged, I find it difficult to know why I was thinking of it. 'You've got to see it from an audience's point of view,' I say, slotting my feet into the space between the drawers and table-top, 'do they want a cute group or serious collaborators?' But this convinces neither of us. We talk about our musical — I'm hesitating because the whole conception seems facetious and naive, and my faith in Neill's music has little to attach itself to. I don't want to get soft and middle-class as I mistrustfully expect to become under Neill's supportive and uncritical influence. Davy & Ronnie will at least approve only what pleases their social Darwinist worldview, and as such they impress me as somehow representative beyond my own muddleheaded aesthetic of dreaminess and solitude.

The next step in the (muddleheaded) dialectic is to refute this secondhand social Darwinism (as I did in an argument with Ron in the van back from our Night Moves gig on Friday), but this in itself doesn't prevent me from thinking his hard-headedness more representative than my nebulous, otherworldly stance. As Sheila said when she was defending 'The Man on Your Street' as something to build on — 'I like it and I'm pretty much Joe Public'.

Now, what I've got to convince myself of is simply this: there is no end to trying to please some abstract crowd, more worthy and real than you. Therefore don't even start. If you don't trust yourself, which at this early stage means endorsing the products of artists who *have* done this (Pavese, Eno, Chekhov tonight) and copying their commitment, then you might as well become a publisher or some other kind of salesman.

And in turnabout reply to this, with which I'm broadly in agreement, I say: but look at Chekhov — he was churning out hack comic stories for magazines at my

age, pandering to a market. And that gradually developed into his mature blend of comedy and tragedy. The 'serious' stance of self-destructive despair leads to suicide or pretentiousness. It's no good saying 'I'm an artist — compromise is foreign to me' — this is simply arrogance and childishness. The knack is to have sympathy with the world, get to know its qualities and flaws like a concerned younger brother, and tell it stories (or sing it songs) resonant with one's good intentions, in whatever state you have been able to preserve them (and if you did what appealed to you rather than applying yourself to someone else's unexplained demands, they should be in a healthy state — good intentions are the offspring of freedom and responsibility; the best kind of self-centredness).

At the launderette I could approve neither the debby girl — long wavy blonde hair, classical aristocratic face, pink woollen jersey, grey pleated skirt, leggings, giggles — who exchanged loud domestic banalities with an old, snooty American lady, nor the usual meek clientele with their malicious-looking side-glances at my Chinese coat and book on Japanese art. Is it really necessary to choose between warm-hearted conformity and the selfish but irresistible pursuit of beauty wherever it's to be found (and it's usually hidden in the straw of loneliness)? But I don't condemn the aristocrats, I don't condemn the combat-jacketed boys who were looking askance at me, and I'm incapable of feeling any malice towards them; at most I say 'not for me' and go back to my book — this doesn't prevent me from rereading the same line twenty times and listening to their conversation in the belief that they are more important than a description of Japanese art, at least while they're within earshot.

As soon as you have values, it could be argued (said he, postponing having values), you have enemies. You can tell moral people by the enemies they've amassed, or, to put it less dramatically, by the number of people they are willing to try to influence. A moral person will probably prefer his enemies (people like himself, but convinced differently) to the people he can convert. Perhaps artists should avoid at all costs becoming either moral people or possible converts. I recognise in myself a destructive impulse which keeps demolishing systems — moral beliefs — as they build up in me. Perhaps this is what Kafka meant by keeping the peephole on the world clean.

Thursday December 16th

I'll administer a questionnaire.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

These tend to swing to and fro with each little sign of changed fortune, and why shouldn't they? But the options are obviously something like this:

1. Make a go of recording songs, probably with Neill, on some small-time label, in the confidence that the 'business' can accommodate your needs, financial and expressive (neither has yet been met).
2. Go back to university and weather your writing block (euphemism for laziness born of insufficient need) in the pursuit of credentials and a less self-defensive appreciation of English writing (even those oppressive 19th century dames).
3. Make the kind of escape described in sociology as a disappearance (surely a theme of your life, along with hiding, invisibility, and the melancholy grudge you harbour against uncomplicated vitality)... move to another city and see if even this is not enough to scare you into manufacturing a proper self: for Edinburgh makes you lazy.

Last night I thought a lot about Voluntary Service Overseas, but when I followed it up in the university careers library (awful OTC types — one boy smoked his cigarette with infuriating long drags and forced smoky sighs of exhalation, like a seedy sub-editor) I was a bit repulsed by the church-cum-industrial dimensions — missionary work on behalf of the kind of development even we who invented it to meet our own needs can't fully endorse, though this didn't seem to have worried the scraggy science graduates and CU virgins pictured creasing their white faces into managerial grins in various parts of Africa and Asia. Behind its hand, the VSO journal hinted that the benefits were largely 'accrued' to the volunteers, not least 'in terms of future salary increments'. But perhaps I don't

consider playing the system enough, though who knows whether such double dealing (you posit your own personal good against the personal usefulness they balance against what they take to be the consensual good of the ostensible *service* — that is, you pretend to accept the social work / personal leisure (or advantage) contract whilst actually gleaned and structuring *personal work* from the experience) — whether such double dealing is not the pride which reconciles most egotists to selfless service (quite rightly and just as well) but might defructify a narcissist. All this is very clumsily put.

Of these choices, tonight I pick 2. This'll mean getting a job soon and getting some reading done. It may be a betrayal of Neill, in the short term, and this is tied up with my fear of being cherished by anyone less wild than myself. When I'm sitting with Neill, between his hugs of greeting and farewell, I find myself forced to get cold and quiet, to draw back from him, or to become coy and flirtatious, as Mother made me when she laughed at my trick of rolling my eyes. He finds me 'cute', but if I, tipsy, incorporate this into my behaviour it embarrasses us both. What he finds cute, or decides to see as such in order to have any leverage on me, is my seriousness, and I really can't accept that; that's my finger in the dyke; behind it, bobbing happily in the economic deluge, floats the flotsam and jetsam of well-adjusted people, and, for whatever reason (usually lack of confidence at an early age) I can't swim, let alone float.

I pick 2 because nobody lives by writing until they're 40 (but has anyone died by it before then? If not, 'lives' implies an unnecessary standard), and even then would better not to, because it's at least worth trying the Eliot / Pavese / Kafka option of passing as a bank clerk or something half the time (seeing something of the reality principle and getting paid for it) and because, in the benign hands of, say, the British Council, exile and eccentricity and 'cultured attitudes' soften the reality blow (perhaps too much — 'The Thief's Journal' couldn't have been written by a diplomat). Then there's the chance to do one's political bit within a social institution, the place of daily political change, rather than burdening personal insights into life's higgeldy-piggeldy with same. Then again, this may be a very wrong-headed observation — Brecht would certainly say so.

And whilst I abhor the ‘insurance policy’ view of certificates, I don’t (tonight) have the courage to say ‘fuck security, fuck the wine-drinking, cultured folk, to the devil with all those otherwise-reliable, middle-aged people who say ‘you’ll change as you grow older’. I don’t say this, not because I don’t reject all these glittering fixtures or this fatuous advice (never offered outside the confines of a university or its products’ retrospective thoughts) but because I lack faith in my rough and tumble skills, my capacity to survive by befriending. But without testing myself, without *making* one of these decisions, I won’t know what’s latent in me. Hesitation is itself a choice, and usually a bad one.

At the Job Centre one boy said to the other: ‘Here’s a job for you, Davy; part-time thief!’ I laughed, and so did Davy, in a self-incriminating way. But that’s what I needed to be reminded as I drifted, increasingly dejected, in front of those computer cards, those screens: what they obscure is agency, the possibility of doing something without a legitimate handle. I wrote myself a card in my head for my present claimant’s life:

Area: Central

Salary: £25 a week

Duties: part-time singing and song composition, part-time dreaming and social criticism, extensive reading activity in fields of melancholy European fiction, general aesthetic interests (eg Asian drama and music) and the realm of the suppressed possible, with a view to literary composition, speculation over Lapsang Suchong and Polish rye bread whilst gazing over a river and treetops (experience preferable, from primary school onwards) and listening to slow music, daily walking, including visits to local university and library, partial insomnia an advantage.

But, more seriously (and this means in future), this capacity to *generate my own legitimacy*, preferably from the most unpromising, irredeemable components, is my most fervent ambition. It means twice the effort, but the energy which comes from self-actualisation is easily twice that inspired by drudgery on a well-worn path, as long as one has an underlying respect for the medium (which means for a few other practitioners of it) and there is some corresponding respect ‘out

there’. Respects of both types have waxed and waned away from pop, in me and in the climate, of late, and my doubt about the *recipients* of writing, unleashed just as I was leaving university by an article in the Literary Review, have been overshadowed by a reaffirmed respect for a whole procession of people from Aristophanes to Pavese.

One moment’s impulsive vitality (pop) is the next’s sticky Kleenex.

Teabags are like kisses with bodies that decay.

But the question-master sees a characteristic hovering between options 2 and 3 followed by a characteristic *non sequitur* which may nonetheless... — the questionmaster’s habit of mind blows his rhetorical cover.

‘But this is about my future — real, not a game!’

‘You mean your future isn’t playful?’

Momus
Diaries 1981-1982
The Bertie Wooster of Alienation
First published as an ebook 2016
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